



SPRINGBOK

SPRINGBOK IN SUNSHINE

by
KATHARINE L. SIMMS

With 15 Illustrations

HUTCHINSON & CO. (Publishers), LTD.
LONDON :: NEW YORK :: MELBOURNE :: SYDNEY

THIS BOOK IS PRODUCED IN
COMPLETE CONFORMITY WITH THE
AUTHORIZED ECONOMY STANDARDS

PRINTED IN
GREAT BRITAIN,
AT THE ANCHOR
PRESS, TIPTREE,
:: ESSEX ::

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Some parts of this book have appeared in *Chambers's Journal*, the *Overseas Magazine*, *Home and Country*, and magazines and papers of the Argus South African Newspapers Ltd., to whose editors I owe my thanks for their courteous permission to republish.

K. L. SIMMS.

WHILE the characters in this book are drawn to some extent from real life, no name used refers to anyone in actual life bearing a similar name.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	FACING PAGE
Springbok	<i>Frontispiece</i>
The Homestead (Barenklau), which cost £450 in 1928	32
Wool bales	32
A community birds' nest, built in a camel-thorn tree	33
Merino sheep	33
A stretch of the Great Fish River near Mariental	48
Approaching Goodhouse, near the Orange River	48
Parklike country	49
The end of a gemsbok shoot	49
Black and white	96
Eat more fruit!—melon in this case	96
Herrero women and little girl	97
A Hottentot housegirl	97
A goods train on the narrow gauge railway near Omaruru	112
The Donkeymobile—a favourite family conveyance	112
A typical irrigation dam in South-West Africa	113
Artesian water in the Aub Valley	113

PROLOGUE

A PROPERLY GRATEFUL BRITISH GOVERNMENT HAS SEEMINGLY BEEN PLANNING A place in the sun for all her forces and workers who have been winning the crusade for Freedom. It is to be hoped Britain can achieve this metaphorically if she be willing enough, but if the sun be wanted in reality, then there must be migration to lands of the South. For the British climate cannot be commanded.

The sun, and a place in it, can only be had in some such country as South Africa.

To own a "place" in Britain you need to be wealthy. But in South Africa a place is possible for almost anyone. They speak there of "Coetzee's place", or "Nel's place", or "Smith's place"; only they pronounce it "plek", and they mean a farm or a plantation.

Looking forward to the coming of peace, the South African Government has already expressed itself eager to welcome settlers, and to help them with grants of land, loans, and advice. Naturally, they think first of their own returning service men, but they will also welcome others of the Empire. There is space in the vastness of South Africa for so many.

Already migration to the Dominions after this war has been discussed in Westminster. On May 25th, 1943, the topic was introduced in the House of Lords.

Lord Barnby suggested that centres should be created in Britain where British children could be prepared for life in the Dominions, so that a flow of migrants could be provided to follow those who go immediately after this war. And Lord Bledisloe, Governor of New Zealand from 1930-35, said that there was scope for 5,000,000 new people in that Dominion within the next ten years without upsetting the employment facilities of the New Zealanders themselves. He added that the same applied to the other Dominions.

It would, of course, be wrong to suggest, as Lord Mansfield truly said, that this migration should depend on the problems of employment in Britain. That would be selfish and inconsiderate towards the Dominions. The real point is that the population of the Dominions should be increased as much for their sakes as for Britain's. For our future prosperity, congestion in Britain must be prevented, and the empty spaces in the Empire peopled.

It is surely a ludicrous state of affairs that a small country like Britain should have a population of some 40,000,000 crammed into it, while the wide spaces of South Africa, so fertile, and capable of supporting tens of millions, should be peopled with a total of a mere 10,000,000 souls, black and white.

Probably the very people to whom a suggestion to migrate is addressed will be the most staggered by it. At first thought it will leave them breathless. That old ungrammatical exclamation of surprise will leap to their lips.

"What! Me! Go abroad!"

Probably there does not exist today the young man of whom we once heard, who would not leave his home in the south of England to take a job in the north because he suspected he could not get a weekly bath in such foreign parts. But with modern transport's annihilation of distances, the man who still thinks South Africa remote will find himself in the same category as this unenterprising young man. South Africa in times of peace will be very accessible indeed. Why not, then, consider it as an outlet for many from the congestion in Britain which must exist for some time to come? We are not considering a mere country; we are looking at a great sub-continent out of which to choose a home and the making of a livelihood.

I write of farm life in South Africa because that has been my experience.

And I think there is no more satisfying work in the world than making a place, a home, a garden, for yourself and your children, out of new, untouched land. It is the most creative of all work. You start from the beginning and everything which results has emanated from your own mind and hands. It gives an exhilaration, and a growing feeling of confidence, and humbly you give thanks for the power you have been able to wield over the essentials God gives you to start with: the soil has yielded crops and fruits and flowers to your efforts; the rain-waters have been dammed and stored; the stone and clay has been used for buildings and a house; the animals you have faithfully tended have given you produce and an increase in their own kind. Even if you buy a ready-made farm as a going concern you will find yourself reshaping it to your liking, adding improvements, putting back most of what you have taken out of it—and, in the end, loving it all as your own creation.

For the trained agriculturist, also, there is a need in Government posts and in Agricultural Schools, which in some cases could possibly be combined with private farming.

Although South Africa is so largely a farming and ranching country, everyone cannot farm. They may not want to, having other preferences. For these there are increasing opportunities in the ever expanding industries of the Union: the mines, factories, and commerce. That this expansion will be tremendous in peace has already been foreshadowed during this war.

Many of the small shopkeepers of Britain who were forced to close down by the cruel circumstances of 1939 onward will be asking themselves how, and even if, they can set up again in Britain. Many difficulties, including Government controls, will remain for years, and competition will be keen. If you are one of these, then ask yourself if you want to open up a little shop again, this time within a stone's-throw of some large, overpowering chain store, wherein every sixpence you or your wife may spend will go towards closing down your own shop again.

Would it not make more sense to open up again in some place where there are fewer rivals; where you will have perhaps a monopoly, or, at worst, competitors who are no stronger than yourself? In the still empty tracts of South Africa there are going to be new settlements requiring shops. I have lived 200 miles from the possibility of a permanent wave! And one could not afford such a journey for so frivolous but desirable a purpose unless an aching tooth drove one to the dentist at the same distance. Then a local lady, trained before marriage as a hairdresser in Cape Town, opened up a local shop. Her best advertisement was her first customer: we all took one look at the freshly waved beauty, and trailed in like a line of ducks.

As an alternative to static shopkeeping (or storekeeping, as it is called out here), you may prefer "smousing", especially if you are a bachelor and like an active, outdoor life. A smouser loads up a wagon with bales of cloth, haberdashery, hardware, stationery, and anything he thinks humanity may need, and tours the farms and distant settlements, both European and native, selling as he goes, and taking orders for the delivery of heavier goods. It is mostly a cash-on-the-nail business, and pays well when foresight and energy are used. Many stores combine this sort of salesmanship with their storekeeping in a dorp or town.

If character really shapes one's destiny, there must be many Britons willing to try anything once, especially those who feel that after their experiences in this war they can never again take up the old life they had before in Civvy Street. They will not want to continue for ever getting up in the darkness of a northern morning to eat a quick breakfast (perhaps scratched together by their own hands), trudging through slush or snow to catch and cling to a crowded bus or train, and then sit damp and cold all day in a stuffy office or work place.

That can never happen to anyone in South Africa, where the sun insists on

waking you every day of the year, and the tea or coffee comes into your room about 5.30 a.m. You get up at this hour, not because you must, but because you want to. It is unthinkable to stay in bed when the world is so bright, and the air coming through the open windows is cool and soft, coaxing you irresistibly to come outdoors and do the congenial work awaiting you on your own "place".

It is sometimes said that South Africa is a hard country. So it is. But then, what part of the world is not hard for the man or woman with his living to make? Can anything be more difficult and hard than making a start in any capacity in the loneliness of London, or the competitive atmosphere of Britain's other industrial cities?

Some of South Africa's difficulties and hardships are peculiar to herself, and as you discover them, sort them out, and define them, you have the fun of attacking them, outflanking them, and finally overcoming them. You will always get over the hardships in the end, but you will never get over the beauties of South Africa! Before long they will get over you. For peculiar to this great country also are the loveliness of vision, sound, scent, colour, and feeling of atmosphere, which she spreads before the newcomer and old lover alike.

You will think, "Life has been mere existence until now!" when once you have seen the springbok leaping in the sunlight. Life is experience, and experience is life. If you have sampled the loneliness of the crowded cities of Britain, then try the different loneliness of the veld, and the rare joys of contact with humanity will become all the sweeter because you will have to seek them. In South Africa people think nothing of driving a hundred miles or more to a dance. Arrived there in the town, you make and meet more friends than seems possible. Your eagerness acts like a magnet. You dance all night, and then drive back to your own place, leaving before dawn. If you have only thirty or forty miles to go, you will not need to miss any of the early morning work awaiting you on your place.

Arriving home like this one morning about seven o'clock, I felt I could not go indoors just yet. It had rained heavily during the night, the air was like bubbly, and the garden looked so happy that I took a walk round. Standing very still, I smelt the melons ripening, and heard them growing! They were making little "plop" noises as the plants sucked up the generous moisture, and the fruit swelled fit to burst with the rare surprise of rain. Sometimes, of course, the melons do burst, exposing a gash that looks like a delighted grin: the smiling pink lips and black teeth of a water-melon, or the yellow delight of a canteloup. You will never buy a burst melon in an English fruit-shop, but they are heavenly to eat, fresh picked from the melon-beds in your own South African garden.

Let us make no mistake: you will leave behind in Britain much that you have loved, and which has been part of your very life from childhood. The things that make home: the fields in Somerset yellow with cowslips in springtime; Devon lanes banked with primroses; familiar peals of village church bells; the song of the nightingale in a Surrey wood; the scents of the Yorkshire moors; old pals at the *Pig and Whistle*. Yet the great essentials will not be lost for you: the Freedoms for which you have striven are equally prized in South Africa. She voluntarily fought for these too. And all the goodness, friendship, and loveliness of the world will await you there. It will be offered unstintingly,

When you have slipped down the Solent, and turned south, your mind will still look astern, northward, even after England has gone from sight. There will be, in imagination, the scent of those narcotic Kentish hops in your nostrils, you will still see the forests of Hampshire in your mind's eye, and a nostalgic longing for the feel of a London river mist will assail you. But inevitably this bad spell will fade, and life aboard ship involve you. Later, as you approach the Cape of Good Hope, another attack of homesickness may come, when you hear returning South Africans eagerly talking about their own arrival "home". Listen to them.

You will learn much, and also forget your own troubles in a newly aroused curiosity which will rise in a crescendo to a real eagerness towards the country which is to become your own new home.

While not wishing to decry the worth of patriotism, it can surely be stated that there has been too much sentimental sobstuff written and spoken about this England of ours. Some of it is, admittedly, good writing. But then, good writing can bluff people into thinking anything! We have thought of England as a little island set in silver, as a green and pleasant land (forgetting the smoky cities), and proudly as our island fortress.

Have you ever considered England as a moated grange, haunted by a demented ogre, reincarnated with each new Government and Parliament, whose chief mania among many manias is to sit and think up forms for you to fill up, and to demand and spend your money, like the lunatic who spent happy days writing astronomically-figured cheques?

This Parliament of ours, before this Second Great War, when asked to raise the Old Age Pension, said it could not afford the £3,000,000 a year which it would take for the purpose. Yet shortly after, it started to spend £5,000,000, and later £15,000,000, *a day!*—on death and destruction, the while it sits and clamours for babies, and yet more babies, as cannon-fodder for a future war. (Ostensibly it does not want this nation to become a country of old folk.)

You have been fighting for Freedom, with a big F. What is this Freedom exactly? The Atlantic Charter defines it, but do you, when you return from fighting and working, expect to find it waiting for you on your doorstep like a bottle of milk? For that matter, do you expect to find a doorstep of your own?

You remember the Brains Trust? In its broadcast at 8.15 p.m. on April 13th, 1943, Commander Gould gave it as his opinion that Britain is over-populated. He spoke in answer to a question as to the size of family people should have when peace returns to the world, and he spoke somewhat defiantly, perhaps in view of the clamour for babies during the war. It is not the thing to say nowadays that Britain is over-populated, nor to do anything but ignore the rampant fact that there is a misery-making shortage of homes, which must continue for years, in which to raise more over-population. So Commander Gould's courage in speaking as he did is to be admired.

We may be a seafaring nation of sailors and fishermen, but does that mean we must live in rows, back to back, and side by side, like sardines in a tin? Do you want, then, to return from the war to live with your dependents in "digs", or in a warren of so-called flats, which are no more than a "bed-sit" apiece, "with use of" bath and kitchen, paying as much for this as you should for a decent house and garden?

It has been promised, for what promises are worth, that agriculture in Britain will never again be allowed to languish and starve. One wonders, then, why the Land Army is to be excluded from the scheme to grant free higher educational facilities to Service personnel after the armistice, even for the study of agriculture itself.

Is there good acreage enough, and goodwill enough, in this tight little island to allow to every returning Serviceman who wants it even a small piece of land with a house on it? Probably not. He can, if he likes, have a square yard of pavement on which to stand and sell matches—and good luck to him. Standing there, in the wind and the rain, he will not be interfering with land monopolies, vested interests, or landlords' rights; he will not be in the way of the green belts of the architectural planners and dreamers.

"Let him stand and wait," says the ogre; "we'll see to him in (our own) good time." Meanwhile, of course, he has no money left; it has all trickled away in standing and waiting, existing and waiting.

"That's too bad," the ogre goes on. "But we'll look after him presently. Meantime he can fill up these forms for us. Why remind us of him now, when we're busy—busy fixing up the Germans!"

So the crazy ogre in the moated grange of Britain will speak, its 615 voices assuming the royal plural.

We—James and I—approached South Africa from the East, but our feelings of nostalgia were just as described in you who approach it from Britain. If sympathy will help, you have it, for in spite of many uprootings there still remains all of a cat's dislike of a move, paradoxically coupled with an insatiable desire to see the next place Fate may offer.

Obviously, a country's history affects its later ways of life. To understand South Africa it is wiser to know how it came into being, even before it became the Union of South Africa thirty-three years ago; how the South Africans have evolved into an individual nation, no longer merely Portuguese or Dutch, English, or French.

When Portugal was a great sea-power in the fifteenth century, a sailor of that country, Bartholomew Diaz, led an exploring expedition of three ships southward and, after many adventures, sighted the Cape. But it was not until ten years later, in 1497, that Vasco de Gama, another Portuguese, landed at St. Helena Bay, about twenty miles north of the Cape. The Portuguese did not attempt any settlement there, even then. They merely made the place a watering-place for their ships on the way to and from their trading in India. After this the English, Dutch and French trading companies also put in at the Cape, on their voyages, for water, rest, and anchorage, but no nation laid claim to the spot as its own possession.

It was not until the survivors of a Dutch ship which ran aground at the Cape in 1648 gave such a first-rate account of the soil, climate, and immediate surroundings of the district, which they had investigated during their wait there for rescue, that the Dutch East India Company decided to make a settled station there. Van Riebeck landed in 1652, took formal possession for Holland, built a fort, and started agriculture in a small way to provide fresh food for his country's trading vessels.

Eight years later Cape Castle was built, and a few troops established at the Cape. Then, in 1679, Simon Van der Stel came out from Holland as the Cape's first Governor. Van der Stel was a keen farmer, but although he started to farm for the Dutch East India Company, he ended up by being over-interested in making money from the land for himself, exploiting the Dutch settlers who had come out. These settlers sent a complaint home, with the result that Van der Stel was relieved of his office.

Meanwhile some of the settlers had penetrated farther inland to freedom from the greedy control of the Governor and the Dutch East India Company. And thus began the great Boer habit of trekking away from trouble, real or imaginary, and the preference for living "out back", as far away as possible from control and restrictions, where a man could be his own law.

In 1685 more settlers came to the Cape Colony of Holland. They were chiefly refugees from France and Holland, driven from their homelands by religious persecution. A lot of these, finding life difficult in the immediate presence of the Company officers at the Cape, also trekked inland, so that by 1770 there were many small groups of people isolated up country.

These Boers (or farmers) by intermarriage formed the nucleus of the present day South African, with English blood added later. The love of isolation in which they first established themselves persists to this day. They are now, after generations of life on the veld, born stock-breeders and hunters, and, being descended

from religious refugees, are still deeply religious. A large old family Bible, with brass clasp, is to be found in most Boer farmhouses to this day. A simple strength of character is their strong point, but a lack of all education, until very recently, has been a great weakness in them. This gives the newcomer the impression that the Boer is narrow, self-centred, slow and pig-headed. But conditions have changed rapidly through recent years, and the modern means of transport, educational facilities, and advancing civilization (which some say is synonymous with womanization!) have brought the backveld Boer forward, to some extent, out of his self-inflicted loneliness, and shown him to be a fellow of great worth and fundamental soundness.

When Portuguese sea-power passed away, and Dutch supremacy at sea, in its turn, gave way to Britain, the English, in 1781, decided it would be a good thing to have the Cape for themselves. After one abortive attempt to take it by force, they eventually acquired it in 1795 with but little fighting. England was at war with Holland at the time, and that country had been so weakened financially by falling trade and war, that the Dutch, already dissatisfied with the Dutch East India Company's rule at the Cape, offered little resistance.

Britain's tenure of the Cape was short-lived, however, for she handed it back to the Dutch in 1803 at the end of her hostilities with Holland.

Then came the Napoleonic wars, and Britain again fought for the Cape. This time the fighting was harder, but the English gained their end. At the finish of these wars Britain restored some of Holland's and France's captured possessions, but kept the Cape Colony. So the Dutch out there came again under British rule—not at all willingly this time.

Differences might, however, have died out in time, but for one great question which still persists today.

This is the respective attitudes of the Dutch and English towards South Africa's native population.

Naturally enough, the natives in the Cape Peninsula had resented the intrusion of the white man. There had been bloodshed whenever the first Dutch trekkers inland had encountered the black man. Consequently the Dutch had always held the view that the inimical native was no better than vermin to be killed whenever possible or, at best, to be kept as a slave. Remember that these inland, isolated Boers lived out of all touch with the European world. They knew nothing at all of the awakening conscience of the Old World towards the black man everywhere. They could not dream that the abolition of slavery by Britain was near. So that the very first clashes in South Africa between Boer and British were over the native question. Whenever a Boer was alleged to have ill-treated a native, the British law, dictated from England, upheld the native.

Later history makes one think that both sides were right: if the Boers had been less harsh towards the native, and the English less soft, the Kaffir wars which began at the beginning of the nineteenth century might have been sooner suppressed by a united front and firmer action. As it was, tribe after tribe felt free to fall upon the settlers strung along the ill-defined frontiers of civilization of that time, burning homesteads, murdering and pillaging.

It was during a period of comparative peace, in 1820, that the Government in England decided to reinforce and develop the Cape Colony, though not to extend its boundaries. So they sent out several thousand emigrants. These 1820 settlers went mostly to one district to farm grants of land made to them, and established the beginning of the 1820 Settlers' Association, which exists today in South Africa (with offices in London) for the mutual aid of all settlers, old and new, in South Africa.

In 1835 the Kaffirs again set out to war on the whites, and hundreds of farmers had their farms destroyed. Terror flooded the Colony until Sir Benjamin D'Urban

(a great Governor, after whom the city of Durban was later named) took strong action, and with a sufficiency of troops drove the tribes out of the white man's newly acquired territory. He was a wise Governor who knew well all the local conditions throughout the territory. He drew up plans for the protection of the white man which would have entailed no hardship for the black. But England's conscience towards the native races was at this time over-sensitive, deeply repentant as she was in high circles over her part in the West African slave trade of recent years. England would have none of D'Urban's scheme.

The result of this was that many settlers started to trek once more across the frontiers away from British rule, just as their predecessors had trekked away from Dutch rule. Perhaps they felt that as isolated units in the unknown country beyond they would be in no greater danger than in the border settlements which had for so long been such an exposed and habitual target for the Kaffirs.

Probably these trekkers were wise, for along the frontier Kafir depredations started again, and continued off and on until nearly 1880. This migration in 1836 has come to be known as the Great Trek, and consisted mostly of Dutch farmers with Piet Retief as their leader. He and his followers were more than disgusted with the leniency with which the British Government obstinately and persistently looked on the black man, in spite of all the terror he had caused to themselves. They trekked with a determination in their hearts of opposition towards the British, both then and for the future. This split in a bi-national community, which might have welded peaceably into one much sooner than it eventually did had D'Urban's wise and strong policy been firmly followed, was the basic cause of all the troubles which followed, culminating in the South African War. If only Britain had realized then, as she has more recently, that a new, strange country can be better governed by the men on the spot than by the stay-at-homes in Whitehall, the Union of South Africa might have been older than it is, and also more heartfelt.

The history of Natal is analogous. Piet Retief was murdered by the Zulu chief Dingaan. The British underestimated the terrible strength of the Zulus and their impis, and dealt too lightly with them. So the Boers again trekked. This time they tried to settle across the Vaal River, and in what is now the Orange Free State, but again they came up against the natives and through them once more against the British.

To make things more difficult the Boers themselves split not only into two factions, but into many subdivisions as well, which at times came near to civil war. It was not until 1864 that the various Boer "Governments" came together as the South African Republic—twelve years after the Boers had succeeded in wringing a consent to their independence from British jurisdiction.

Alone the Boers had pioneered and fought the natives, and always resented the ever following British and the treaties the latter trustingly made with such treacherous chiefs as Dingaan. It was not until later, when England had changed her Government at home, and with the change started her new Colonial policy, that the British gave up trying to treat with the tribes, and themselves fought the Zulus and Matabele. In some instances the Boer and Britisher now fought together, but still, in Dutch eyes as whole, the British remained too lenient in their dealings with the natives. Too often the British underestimated the strength of the native hordes they had to fight. Disasters and glorious defeats were too often the result. Consequently the Boers added a contempt for the seeming weakness of British arms to their long-standing antipathy to British ways. Their own dealings against the natives had been much more successful.

In the meantime other reasons for disputes had arisen. The discoveries of diamonds and of gold gave rise to argument, and troubles grew rather than waned.

Today, though the Boer is a law-abiding citizen of the Union of South Africa, his ingrained and inherited characteristics are often plainly to be seen. He still

prefers living alone among a few of his own kind. He is difficult to know, but once you win his liking and trust, and above all his respect, he is always your friend. His possessions have been so very hard-won that he can be mean over trifles of money or goods, but in big matters of life and death he is a neighbour to be appreciated. Often he would hate to stand you a drink, however generous you had been to him, but he would unhesitatingly risk himself and his much-prized horse on a dangerous ride on the wildest night to summon a doctor to your sick child. His ever-present religious principles may not govern his daily life and dealings on all occasions, for he is as sharp as the proverbial moneylender in business matters, yet when he does decide to give, he gives very generously. If you want to know South Africa, study tolerantly your Boer neighbours, and learn to like them. Success is not difficult.

As regards your attitude to the native, surely it is well at all times to remember that he was in South Africa before either the Dutch or the English, and that he therefore has every right to the intruder's friendship!

It can be seen, then, why it is that the canvas on which so much of South Africa's recent politics has been painted is racialism. Some of the colours put on have been crude and ugly. *Yet much of it proved to be mere daub and splash* when the events of 1939 allowed the true picture to be brought out.

Happily, South Africa possessed one man who could brush away all the superficialities, and make his people realize that underneath there lay the real portrait of South Africa, entitled, "Unity of Purpose and Will". It was General Smuts (as he still likes to be called) who demanded that South Africa should join in the fight against Nazism, and won his way gloriously, because he showed South Africans, many of them blinded by their muddled politics, that in their hearts they wanted to fight.

Smuts is no sentimentalist, however. He never thought that South Africa should fight Britain's wars. Being a man of longer, wider vision than most, he knew emphatically that South Africa could not do otherwise than fight for world peace. It is because he loves South Africa so intensely that he saw a world view, and South Africa's place in it. South Africa could have no place in the world if she stayed out. Neither could she hope to escape strategically when war swept round the globe. I like to remember that General Smuts' birthday is on May 24th, Empire Day—though his vision is even wider than Empire.

The racial politics of South Africa in recent years have been nothing so simple as one race versus another. In fact, that has not been the case at all for a very long time. Rather, the Dutch and English argued *together* about the native, the Indian, the Jew, and about each other. When war came to the world, Smuts, metaphorically speaking, knocked all their heads together and told them to "skip it". He told them to forget such local futilities. He united them for war, and if he can keep them as closely united afterwards for peace, to take a world view instead of merely a South African view of politics, he will have achieved the crown to a great life's work. There is no doubt that he can, and will. That is why South Africa's future, at last, looks so shining today.

In writing of South Africa, I have included South-West Africa too. It is not, strictly speaking, South Africa itself, being mandated territory controlled by the Union. But this district to which we went as pioneers has such possibilities in the future—and it is the future to which the world is looking—that the possible migrant should be shown it.

It has been said that the three curses of South Africa are "tick, ticks, and politics". To take or not to take credit in money matters is an individual and

personal question; the farmers naturally try to eliminate the ticks. But the nation as a whole must purge, and keep clean, its politics, of all that is unwholesome and narrow: racialism and anti-Semitism, as proposed in Malan's defeated bill of 1939, being perhaps the worst points.

After all, like many alliterative phrases, this one perhaps was just invented for its cute effect. For that matter, "sun, sand, sin, and sore eyes" has also been applied as a description to South Africa. The sun is what we are seeking; sin, like tick, is purely a personal choice; sand has its good points, as any gardener will agree, and sore eyes just happen to begin with the letter s.

In a huge, sparsely-populated country like South Africa, which is peopled by whites numbering less than half of London's population alone, personalities count for much more in politics than in Britain. There are many in South Africa who do not altogether agree with all of General Smuts' views, who will nevertheless follow his lead loyally because of their personal love for him, and their knowledge of him. Quite a large proportion of people have met him personally. They call him "Oom Jannie" or "Opa". The latter little term includes all the sentiments expressed in the words "grand old man", "our dear father", and, affectionately, "our old boss". It is an intimate and loving term.

The farmers appreciate General Smuts because he was born a farmer's son, and they know he understands them and all their problems. The English follow him because they know his long loyalty to our Commonwealth of Nations, and the Boers because he is a Boer himself.

CHAPTER I

AS IF A BLOODSTAINED HAND HAD SUDDENLY OPENED TO THROW OUT CRIMSON fingers, the risen sun spread rays of scarlet across the opal dawn. Etched black against the lurid glare, a tangle of palm trees swept down to the seashore, where wavelets tossed red and gold and silver crystals from tiny crest to crest. Seen from the deck of a British India liner, this was our first picture of Africa. It was Africa as I had always expected it to be, and as I always love to remember it. Since then many impressions have been added, varying through the vast sub-continent from the oriental streets and alleys of Zanzibar, the sandy plains of the Karroo, the rocky beauty of the Cape, the waving grain-fields of the Western Provinces, the green forest of Knysna, to the rural loveliness of the dairying district of Darling: but of all the pictures stacked in the mind, as in a studio, the first stands foremost in brilliance, and behind it all the others are kept.

But we—James and I—were not going to South Africa in order to say "Gee!" to the landscape. Tired of a knockabout life, and yet still young enough to appreciate one more adventure in a new land, James had decided that we should settle in South Africa, farm, and make a home.

All the way down the East coast of Africa we saw those lovely palms. Their fronds fingered the breeze of Zanzibar; the same trees lined the wide sandy roads of Beira, were still there at Lourenço Marques, and admired their own reflections in the harbour of Dar-es-Salaam. And again in Durban they added the authentic "foreign" touch to the shore of the Yacht Club.

Arriving in Durban is arriving in South Africa. There are people of dull perception and melancholy outlook who affirm that Durban's chief characteristic is the stench of dead whale from the high green bluff which rises up beyond the harbour. But this is a libel on the place, for nothing but sheerest beauty greets the new arrival when his liner creeps in between the breakwaters into the harbour.

Brilliant sunshine made enchantment of the multi-coloured shipping at the quays. In the bay it picked out in vivid light and shade the jade hills of the Berea, from among the tropical greenery of which there showed the white walls and red roofs of European homes, and poured a glitter of living gold over our promised land. It was a cheering welcome indeed.

The Berea is the chief residential quarter of Durban, and on closer inspection showed luxurious homes: exquisite gardens, gay with cannas, bougainvillaca, and other exotic flowers, hobnobbing with English roses and northern flowers. For part of the wonder of South Africa is its miraculous climate and soils, in which all things animal and vegetable seem to flourish side by side, whether indigenous or not.

All over the wide acres of the Berea the flame trees were in bloom. First from the harbour below we saw the gorgeous splashes of orange colour which flamed among the tree-clad slope above, and later we drove steeply up climbing roads lined from end to end with the burning gold-red of the flamboyant blossoms.

But the time for standing on deck and admiring the view was past. The agony of going through the customs claimed all our attention, and we descended the ship's gangway into the dim, unreligious gloom of the sheds. A paternal British Government, in addition to paying our first-class passages, had allowed us a ton weight of kit, free of charge. And we, foolish ones, had done the obvious thing, and brought a full ton with us, without foreseeing the customs duties to be paid.

Amongst the clank and clatter of cranes, native porters toiled vociferously over packing-cases like Noah's Arks, and trunks like monuments. James got something outsize on his toe, and broke into a torrent of Hindustani—which merci-

fully no one understood, or even bothered to listen to, while all around fellow passengers each bade farewell to six different people at once with fervent and futile promises to write "sometime". The next hour was spent in unpacking and more or less repacking all the things one would really rather not display in public, and in paying out much money for the pastime. It was no use saying that there were only a set of false teeth in a case which contained a set of crockery; customs officials can see through teak.

At last it ended, and at the finish of it all James looked about vaguely with glassy eyes and groaned out: "Let's go and get a drink."

So we climbed into a rickshaw made for two. This vehicle was propelled most hectically by a powerful Zulu dressed chiefly in stripes of white lead, ostrich feathers, strings of beads, and a large grin. His head-dress also consisted of waving ostrich feathers and huge buffalo horns, while his anklets of bone and teeth were grimly ghoulish. With many a whoop and yell to his brethren of like profession to get out of his swooping way, he careered us off to one of the big hotels on Durban's sea front. By the grace of Allah and some native porters (we eventually tipped five), our hand luggage followed later—much later!

Since Durban was not our final destination, our first act, after having a drink and a badly-needed bath, was to get into another Zulu-pulled rickshaw and tear madly at the puller's inspiring pace down to West Street to the shipping offices, to secure berths on the mail steamer leaving for Cape Town next day.

That duty done, we set out to look at Durban's seashore. Most interesting of all were the bathing enclosure and the Scotsman's Pool. In the former, for the payment of a small coin, you can bathe insured against the loss of limbs to sharks; in the latter—which means the whole surrounding ocean—you keep your coin and take a chance. The enclosure is a semicircular iron grille, topped by dressing-rooms, enclosing about two acres of Indian Ocean: in this water the more cautious Durbanites wallow in water and freedom of mind, except on those rare occasions when a baby shark has been known to slip through the grille and cause a minor hullabaloo.

But the average South African is an adventurous soul, with the blood of his Voortrekker forefathers in him. So the great majority of people bathe in the limitless Scotsman's Pool, where they become expert surf-riders on the long green rollers hurtling shorewards from far out beyond the limits of any tame enclosure. All along that golden coast the yellow sands and blue waters are thickly dotted every day by the myriad colours of modern bathing undress. There is scarcely a day in the South African's calendar when he cannot bathe in warm sunshine and perfect weather. And there is enough splashing, laughter, and jolly noise to frighten away the sharks. Wise sharks keep out of shallow, broken water. Accidents have been very rare, so happy Durbanites refuse to cram themselves into the enclosure when the free ocean tosses and glitters and beckons in the bright South African sunlight, and flings itself invitingly in foam and spray at their very feet.

At dinner-time James once more broke out absent-mindedly into Hindustani, but this time it was quite all right, as it was an Indian to whom he spoke. The man was the waiter, and was delighted to come across anyone who knew his language. Many of the Durban hotels employ Indian waiters. There is a great deal of trade between South Africa's east coast ports and India, so that Natal, including Durban, possesses quite a considerable Indian population, while some have also filtered inland into other parts as well. Johannesburg has its Indian market, and most little up-country dorps have their Indian greengrocers, known colloquially as "Sammy". (This name is a corruption and abbreviation of Sahajanand Svami, founder of the Svaminarayan religious sect in India.) Though

why the versatile Oriental takes to greengrocery almost exclusively in rural South Africa is a mystery.

At Durban we left land with regret, for the trip round the coast to Cape Town is notoriously unkind to the genus "bad sailor". But fortunately the sea was calm, and as this was the tripper half-price season, the ship was packed. So we had a thoroughly uncomfortable, jolly time as far as Cape Town, especially as we chummed up, in the spontaneous way possible on board ship alone of all places, with an American couple out to "do" South Africa while their liner turned round. Elderly Silas K. Van der Hum (shall we call him?) and his young-old Sadie were filled with a most infectious keenness and vivid interest for all they saw, and heard, and encountered.

At Port Elizabeth we went ashore. The ship anchored out in the bay, so to get to land across the harbour, in those days, passengers had to be swung overboard in a huge, round, wicker contraption, like a glorified work-basket, which lowered them into a little tug waiting alongside. The tug bobbed and curtsied frenziedly, and poor Sadie was feeding the tropical fishes long before we sidled and bumped up to the jetty. Silas K. suggested that the said fishes probably didn't care about European grub anyway.

In Port Elizabeth is South Africa's Snake Park, where specimens of the country's innumerable reptiles of different kinds are kept on public view in a sunk garden surrounded by a miniature moat, which happily prevents the public and the snakes from meeting too intimately. Paradoxically, it is about the only spot in South Africa where you need not fear a snake. It is here that they make the antidote for snake-bite which annually saves many lives throughout South Africa. The serum, when injected in good time, is an infallible remedy against the venom of any snake, and it is the one and only sure remedy. So, although it costs something like two pounds a dose, it is well worth the price, for it is a real life insurance in a snaky district—and I know no rural part of South Africa which is not that; it is only a matter of degree.

That sunk garden was a fascinating place: cobras sunned themselves a d spread their hoods, tree snakes twisted in and out of the branches of the ornamental bushes, water snakes writhed through the moat, and in the middle of them all there stood Johannes, the native keeper, trained for many years to his dangerous job, nonchalantly slinging a puff-adder over his arm, or draping some other reptile around his neck! Johannes, of course, wears rubber gloves, and other protective clothing, but more than once, it is known, has he been bitten by a deadly snake, and his life saved by prompt injections of serum. And still he carries on at about the weirdest job in the world.

Mr. Fitzsimons, the curator of the place, had many amusing yarns to spin in connection with reptilian specimens consigned to Snake Park from up-country farmers and others anxious to make a profit selling live snakes. Several times an insecurely tied parcel of this type has emptied a post-office, or cleared a railway station of humanity. What postal clerk or porter would not bunk on handling a package which hissed at him or wriggled suddenly in his hand?

The citizens of Cape Town seem to be enthusiastic practisers of the heliograph, for soon after our Union Castle liner had passed the Twelve Apostles—giant crags towering above the sea east of Cape Town—and approached the harbour entrance, looking-glasses winked and flashed from many of the white villas stuck on the rocky sides of Table Mountain, much to the delight of Silas K., who thought the idea "vurry cute". When you steam into Table Bay, and see the white homes and buildings of the city spread out for miles along the water's edge and perching among the pines on the steep slopes of Table Mountain which towers over the town, you gasp at the loveliness of it all. I could sympathize with any returning South African who cried with joy at seeing it again after a long absence from such

a home. Then you wonder what lies beyond this great barrier whose flat summit is so often hidden by a "tablecloth" of drifting mist.

But we must land first, though this time we can evade the customs, having suffered that misery once and for all at Durban.

Following Silas K. and his grip, we trooped down the ship's gangway, and found ourselves once more in the midst of a sweating humanity.

As we reached the quay someone alongside bawled "Snowball!" Snowball leapt forward, and proved to be a superlatively black native who for many years had been a well-known porter at the Cape Town docks. At the moment we were saying a reluctant good-bye to the Van der Hums. Silas K. eagerly pointed to Snowball.

"Say, Sadie, just look at that; isn't he too cute? The very essence of Africa for you!"

"Essence is O.K.," agreed Sadie. "I can smell him!"

The white man, on remarking on the unmistakable odour of a native, invariably forgets the fact, if he knows it at all, that we, in our turn, smell queer to the black man. A few years later the Cape papers printed sympathetic paragraphs when Snowball died, and we realized then that we had seen a real South African celebrity on landing.

It was on the quay too that the newcomer got his first lesson in Afrikaans, the taal spoken throughout the country by white and black man alike. "Spuwen is verboden" was written up in very large letters over the sheds, and our first sentence of a foreign language learned was, as usual, a pretty useless one. In the dry heat, glare, and throat-parching dust of the docks, the ability to spit would have been a miracle in any case.

Adderley Street, Cape Town's main thoroughfare, is well worth seeing at any time. The pavements were like a garden, gay with blossom and fruit. Rows of native and Cape-coloured flower-girls lined the pavement edges, selling the wild veld flowers from the interior, and the wonderful fruits grown on the farms of South Africa. Here are proteas, chinchinchee, Cape heathers, purple freesias, flaming aloes, and other strange blooms; here also can be bought Cape gooseberries and grape-fruit almost straight off their bushes and trees; luscious grapes at twopence a pound; peaches, and golden apricots which cost but a shilling for a large box of about two dozen, and giant pumpkins like Cinderella's coach, and cantaloup melons for two shillings or even less.

A circular tram-ride via Sea Point reveals some glorious scenery, and a visit to the suburb of Muizenberg, commonly called "Jewsenberg", or the "land of the waving palms" (not trees this time!), is well worth while. Muizenberg is Cape Town's most famous bathing beach, complete with white palatial pavilions and restaurants, luxury hotels, and all inducements to enjoyment *en masse*, and is a great resort for the considerable Jewish population of the city: hence its nickname.

As well as "doing" Cape Town while we had the chance, we also attended to business. Having previously collected a large wad of literature, and a confusing amount of general information about South Africa, and about its different possibilities for farming, land prices, labour statistics, cost of living, etc., we plumped for sheep-farming in the Karroo, a vast region of a hundred thousand square miles in extent, north of the Cape.

It is generally advisable for the new settler to spend a little time, although it may cost him more than a little money, in looking around him before making any purchase of land on hearsay. In Britain this would be obvious, but in South Africa, where land out in the backveld is sometimes attractively cheap, the newcomer is too inclined to rush in and buy. To wait awhile is a saving in the long run.

Algernon Blackwood is said to have declared: "Let any emigrant young

Englishman earn his living for at least five years in any country before a penny of capital is given him to invest." Five years may sound a big minimum of time, but at all events a year should be the least time taken to look around and find one's proper anchorage.

In the course of this year the newcomer will have had time to learn many of the pitfalls as well as the good points of his surroundings, his work, his neighbours, and his chance of making good, which presumably is his object in coming to South Africa at all. There are regions where mixed farming—perhaps the best way of farming for the tyro—is successfully carried out, and areas such as the Karroo, where sheep alone will bring any profits.

Not the least important part of the newcomer's discoveries would concern his neighbours. South Africans as a whole are very like a big family: they are proud of being South African whatever their respective origins. But, like the members of most united families, they often quarrel among themselves. Really they are a cosmopolitan lot, though the Englishman sometimes thinks he is the only being there.

To avoid treading on toes, one must often distinguish between a Hollander and a Dutchman in South Africa. The former is probably but recently out from Europe; his parents and grandparents still live in Holland. The latter is of Voortrekker descent, and has never been out of South Africa most likely. And both are equally proud of their status, as well they might be. The South African Dutchman is today spoken of as a Boer, but the word is loosely used, for it really means a farmer. Anyone who farms is technically a Boer, but the word is rarely used in this correct sense nowadays, and a Boer to most minds refers to a person of South African-Dutch descent. In that the original settlers at the Cape of Good Hope were Dutch, and farmed in order to exist, history gives us the reason for our present-day use of the word Boer. The average native of South Africa, however, does invariably use the word in its original sense, so the English farmer must not be surprised at hearing himself termed a Boer by his native employees.

There are also the Indians referred to before, the natives of many tribes, the Central European emigrants, the Cape-coloured, or "half-castes", who are by this time a race in themselves, and a heterogeneous conglomeration of other nationalities, mostly Jews from Poland, Finland, Latvia, Czechoslovakia, Germany and elsewhere. All these go to make what is known as a South African. And the best thing the Englishman can do if he wishes to live happily in South Africa is to start right in calling himself a South African too, and stop talking of England as "Home" at every opportunity. This story best illustrates the point. A man, had up on some small charge, was asked in court by the magistrate, "Of what nationality are you?" The man replied: "No nationality—just a South African." After all, to do in Rome as the Romans do, and call yourself a South African when settling in South Africa, involves you in no disloyalty to your mother country, whether that country be England or Poland, or anywhere else. Your younger generation will very soon think of themselves in no other way, in any case. There is a great truth in Ben Jonson's *Volpone*: "To a wise man all the world's his soil; it is not Italy, or France, nor Europe that must bound me if my fates call me forth."

So a child of any parentage born in South Africa, and reared there, is of course a South African, in spite of the Irishman's famous statement that a cat having kittens in the oven does not make them biscuits!

The newcomer will therefore meet many nationalities merged into the comparatively new nation that is South Africa, and he will find many endearing national characteristics common to them all: hospitality, genuine friendliness and helpfulness, generosity and kindness, allied to a great efficiency in the jobs which life in their country demands of them, thrift, and intense loyalty in their family life.

Although a fair mixture of folk is found everywhere, some parts are more English, or more Dutch, or Jewish, as the case may be. The Cape, for instance, is Dutch, Natal largely English, and the Jews seem to prosper in Johannesburg. Yet the great point is that today they are all unitedly South African. Of the black man we must speak separately, for he was of the country long before any white man.

.

After three very pleasant days in Cape Town, we entrained, bound for Britstown, in the Karroo. We were sorry to leave South Africa's mother city, for we had found it very charming. In the train we got into conversation with a fellow traveller, who knew both Cape Town and Durban but was an ardent Durbanite. Cape Town, he said, was depressing, because it lay in the shadow of Table Mountain, squashed between this 3000-foot rampart and the sea. He looked very scornful as he spoke of Cape Town.

"In fact," he said, "Durban is a nice, civilized city; Cape Town is a filthy hole!"

He told us that in his opinion Cape Town slums were the worst in the world, that the whole city is crushed up for want of space, that when George Bernard Shaw visited South Africa in 1932, and learnt something of the city's clums, he declared in a broadcast talk, "Your municipal slogan should be a bathroom for every bedroom!" and added that after the wide streets and picturesque, tree-shaded squares of Durban, Cape Town struck him as a huddled and poky place. He vowed it was a place which, like Topsy, had "just growed", without any planning or forethought. "Cape Town was never laid out; it's been squeezed in," he finished. And we were glad he had finished! But there has always been great rivalry between Durbanites and Cape Town folk as to the respective merits of their cities, while the inhabitants of Johannesburg believe with equal fanaticism that there is no place like home. Happily the newcomer is not handicapped by any such prejudices: he can find the individual charm ready waiting for him in all South Africa's towns, as well as in her three main cities.

Our train left Cape Town at night, so we missed the lovely scenery of the Hex River Valley, though we saw it in later years. Perhaps we appreciated it the more this way round, for after one has come from the drier interior its vivid greenness is a joy to sun-tired eyes. This district contains some of the finest farms in the Cape. It was here that some of the earliest arrivals to the country first settled, grew rich, and built their stately homesteads; big white houses, Dutch-gabled, and handsomely porticoed and balustraded, with lofty stoeps, the whole flanked by groups of substantial outbuildings and barns and surrounded by magnificent trees. It is in this well-watered district, too, that many houses are thatched, instead of being roofed with the ubiquitous corrugated iron of up-country.

Our first sight of South Africa's interior came next morning. We had passed through the barrier of mountains, and awoke to look upon miles of Karroo, that vast, bewildering region of flat plains, utterly treeless, peppered only with a monotony of low-growing, compact bushes, and criss-crossed by sudden ranges of gaunt, naked hills and mountains. It struck us as being as dry, bare, and desolate a country as anyone could imagine or see anywhere. This, I thought, is the land that God forgot when giving out the world's vegetation on the third day of the Creation! The miracle which rain would create was yet to be seen. For rain turns the fertile plains of the Karroo into a fairyland.

As the train crawled like an insignificant brown caterpillar across the flat distances, towards an ever receding horizon, many items of interest cropped up. We gave an answering wave of the hand to a group of jolly native piccanins, all in

their brown birthday suits, who scampered up to shout as the mail train rolled past. They are delightful little souls, these piccaninies of South Africa. Once they inspired me to some doggerel which a South African paper printed:

THE PICCANIN

To see our wonders, tourists, year by year,
Flock South from Northern homes and cities' din.
But quite the greatest wonder we have here
Is Piccanin.

With tight curled wool, and shining jet-black skin,
Such milk-white teeth, bright eyes, and flashing grin.
The self-same suit his birthday found him in,
That's Piccanin!

On mealie pap, corn cobs, goat's flesh, sour bread,
He thrives. With scoff like that he'll not grow thin.
He'll drink black coffee right from birth, 'tis said.
Tough Piccanin!

This tubby baby rolling in the sand,
This little son of Ham their hearts must win;
Back home, they'll long for Southern sunshine, and——
Li'l Piccanin.

The train also passed flocks of merino sheep, grazing off twiggy little bushes. One flock near the railway was in charge of a Hottentotboy. Away in the distance, alone in the wilds, crouching beneath a cactus-crowned kopje, stood a white Dutch-gabled farmhouse, the iron roof of which flashed silver in the bright sunlight. Presumably in this farmhouse lived the farmer and his wife who owned the sheep.

As the train crept on, the sun rose remorselessly higher, till the heat in the narrow-gauge railway carriage became intense. A drought was descending on the parched Karroo, in spite of all hopes and prayers for rain, a train steward told us. We passed more sheep, some wandering around dried-up water-pans with floors of caked, cracked mud; dejected-looking cattle, standing out in the blistering sunshine yearning for shade.

What sort of country had we come to? How could anyone farm in this desert? What did the animals live on when all around, mile after mile, there showed up nothing but those little dried-up clumps of sticks which might once have been bushes? In other districts, which we were to see later, the endless distances of veld were similarly peppered with sun-bleached tufts of grass repeated by the million, instead of these small, withered Karroo bushes. What did people live on in those isolated farm homesteads we saw in the far distance lying leagues from dorp or railway station?

The patient train steward answered many of our naive questions. The sheep and cattle apparently did not want shade from the glare and heat. A nice, convenient philosophy to foist on the creatures in a treeless tract of country! Incidentally, we later proved in another district which is better wooded that these animals do appreciate shade. Photographs of sheep huddled together under spreading branches in the midday heat are proof enough. At all events, these animals could apparently exist on the unsheltered plains without getting sunstroke, and existence is the main thing after all! The bushes we despised as dried up had leaves, we were told, which the farm stock of various kinds enjoyed; they were very tiny leaves, but in their myriads quite adequate and nourishing. And the farmers themselves had plenty to live on: they had fruit and vegetables from the gardens around their homes, mutton galore, and goat's milk, if cows were lacking.

In fact this steward—a staunch South African—was most helpful and reassuring. He hoped very much that we would be very happy in the Karroo, and when he saw our looks of doubt, finished up prophetically with, "Just wait till it rains, missus!"

"And how long must we wait?" we asked. The man spread his hands, smiled, and shrugged.

"Perhaps no time at all," he said. What born optimists South Africans are!

All day the scenery never changed. Long oily waves of heat writhed over the seemingly limitless veld. Every few hours we came to a siding; a few tin-roofed shacks huddling for shade under three or four drooping, pale-green pepper trees. Sometimes we stopped at a little halt; just an iron shanty alone in space. Yet always someone would embark on the train, having come from dear knows where in the wilderness, while someone else would climb down, pile kit into a waiting Cape cart or ramshackle car, and jolt off along a brown ribbon of track which wound away to the empty horizon.

We reached our destination at midnight, twenty-six hours after leaving Cape Town, and it was at last our turn to climb down the high step off the train on to the ground. (Rarely do South African veld stations boast a platform.) We found a Cape cart waiting for hire, and bundled into it. We did not know the anatomy of a Cape cart then, so floundered our way in the dark over plank seats and suitcases to the rear. A band of larking youths shouted "good night" and other salutations to us in Afrikaans, the driver cracked his long sjambok, his two horses sprang forward with a jerk, and we hared up a dimly moonlit road, deeply rutted and lined with the ubiquitous pepper trees, which every dorp and farm in the Karroo plants because of their ability to resist drought.

I have often thought since what a lot might be done in this district with the date palm. Some of the conditions of soil and climate are so like Iraq that palms should grow, if given enough watering. I thought back with longing to the lovely palms of Africa's east coast. We experimented afterwards with dates in the Karroo, and have often wondered since how the little plants we had to leave behind fared when we went away from the Karroo to another part of Africa. It seems impossible to transplant a palm of this kind, as the water-seeking root is very long, and if this is broken when lifting the palm, the plant promptly dies.

After turning several corners on our outer wheels, our cart drew up, the horses stopping in response to a whistle from their driver—a signal which every quadruped in South Africa recognizes as the order to cease moving. We had arrived at a dorp hotel.

My host, the Russian-Jewish proprietor, met us in the hall, suitably clad for the hour in a red dressing-gown and peaked white nightcap, and with a candle to light him. We were parched with thirst after travelling through the summer night. That last iced drink on the train already seemed a long way back. We might have persuaded our friend to reopen his bar, if only James had not thoughtlessly asked of me, "How about a nightcap?" The landlord was not pleased at what he took to be a personal reference, and coldly refused us anything but the water, which he said we would find in our bedroom. We presently wished the water were as cold as his voice had been. We emptied the carafe and started on the big wash-jug!

Very early next morning we thrust our heads out of the window to look at a South African dorp for the first time. The place seemed dead. At that hour the dorp consisted of three or four quiet, dusty roads with peppers and blue gums growing by the irrigation furrows which streamed down the roadsides—but nothing stirred. Behind the peppers, gums, and some half-nude firs there hid the squat, white houses and stores with tin roofs painted gaily in white and black and red

and green, some plain and some striped. It was an illustrated sum in permutations and combinations.

The first sign of life was a very yellow dog with a very curly tail, and then the rest followed quickly. They were the native boys and girls going to their daily work as maids and house-servants or store-hands in the private houses and shops of the dorp. Their first duty on arrival would be to make early-morning tea, or more probably "kawffee drink", as they call the beverage, for their white employers. We could hear the clatter of crockery and the servants' cheerful chatter down below in the hotel now, as well as on other people's back stoeps.

Presently our "kawffee" arrived, the tray neatly balanced on the head of a real portly mammy, flashing a grin from traditionally white teeth, and wearing the traditional spotted handkerchief, or dook, on her woolly head, just as the story-books would lead one to expect! She greeted us in a cheerful flow of Afrikaans, to which James replied, "You bet," and to which the ebony lady answered, "Ja baas." The bright conversation ended with a few more remarks—about the weather, for all one could tell! After her departure I said to James:

"You know, we really must put our minds to learning the lingo, James."

So far we both knew the admonition on the Cape Town docks, and that would not take one far if said to a stranger, except perhaps on the end of a kick. In the heat of the train journey we had listlessly culled a few nouns from a textbook, but nouns have their limitations. And presently we should have to go forth and do our shopping in this strange place; there were stores to buy to take with us to our new farm. I wondered feverishly if French really "took you everywhere", as we had been assured long ago at school as an inducement to learn it. Those long past nine years of struggling with French seemed such utter waste now. Fate might have arranged in advance to teach us Dutch instead! As it was, we should have to go in and out of shops and stores, being metaphorically handed stones when we had more or less asked for bread. For our new textbook was of the good old type: we were to say to a storekeeper or anyone else who cared to listen, "Have you a pen?" and he would reply, if properly educated, "No, but I have the hat of my aunt's gardener." And that would not get us back rashers, or anything useful at all.

But before facing this problem in all its frightfulness, there was breakfast to comfort us. Silas K. Van der Hum, who had dearly loved a yarn, had told us that a friend of his on a trip up-country in South Africa had found lion chops and tiger cats on the breakfast menu of his hotel, only to discover that a careless typist had meant to write loin chops and Tiger oats—a brand of breakfast porridge well known out here. "Very tame!" as Silas K. had aptly remarked after his little joke, just to round it off. In our own case, the boy who waited on us suggested mealie meal porridge, "yeggs", and toast with cheese and marmalade. The last, both dietetically and aesthetically, is an excellent combination, and cheese is often found on the breakfast tables of the country.

The eggs were fresh and nice, having probably been laid in the hotel's back yard, where we could hear their producers promising more. Fowls of all descriptions abound throughout South Africa, yet there are many folk who think it wild waste to eat an egg. The natives, and many Boers, seem to think that the only thing to do with an egg is to hatch it or, failing that, to sell it. So many a child on the farms has never tasted an egg! The argument is that there is so much more meat on a hatched egg. These people have no doubt as to which comes first, the egg or the hen. So every egg laid is either sold or hatched, and those which prove obstinately unhatchable are obligingly eaten by the native, to whom an egg is an egg. Once we found a hard-boiled egg among a dozen bought in a store, and cannot imagine who can have been so wickedly extravagant as to have cooked a future hen. The successful sale of the boiled egg perhaps atoned for the

crime. Later, a darkie handmaiden once watched me make a cake with three eggs in it. She shook her head. "Three chickens finished, missus," she opined. Nevertheless, the same lady was so inconsistent as thoroughly to appreciate bacon and eggs for breakfast when given them.

After breakfast we put on thick felt hats and set forth to see and be seen. The latter was trying: in a dorp, as in a little English village, everyone knows everyone else, and the newcomer is something of a peepshow. Also, in this case we badly wanted to be seen but not heard. But there was no shirking the shopping. So we entered the low, whitewashed store, and looked about timidly praying for rescue, even while we hoped no one would speak to us. A tall, fair young man approached me. I opened my mouth twice, and began, "*Avez vous*—that is het ye—er . . ." The young man smiled, then grinned, and then spoke in perfect English, for the simple reason that he was English. In any case the white man of all nationalities in South Africa—the average South African—is an excellent linguist. Most of the Boers we met, even the backveld ones, spoke enough English to save our faces. We often wished they would not be so courteous as to adopt our language for our benefit, as we really did want to take every opportunity of learning Afrikaans. It really is advisable to learn it as quickly as possible. Everyone speaks it. Yet too many English people think it enough to learn a few swear words, and for the rest, talk as loudly as possible in English. But on this first alarming outing I was truly glad of that English store assistant. He produced just about everything I could possibly want for my larder, and then started to offer ploughs, balers, harrows and what-not which he said were useful about a farm. At this point I referred the young man to James.

"James," I called, "do you want any implements? I've been shown some splendid ones." (The description was the young man's. I scarcely knew a baler from a railway engine.)

James turned upon the young man quite fiercely. "*Ne, nein, non, NO!*" he barked, then glaring at me said snappily that all he wanted after an hour spent in the hot and dusty store was a drink, and how was he to ask for one in such a lingo? His shop assistant had been one of the few who spoke nothing but Afrikaans, and James had spent a harassing morning buying he scarcely knew what. My assistant beamed again, and overwhelmed James, as he had done me, by saying in English, "Here comes the eleven o'clock tea."

"Elevenes" was a national institution in South Africa long before anyone else in this world ever thought of refreshment in the middle of the morning. In every home, office, and shop throughout the land, workers and housewives down tools at 11 a.m. to drink tea. It's "kawfee" in the early morning, and "kawfee" at 4 p.m., but it is generally tea at eleven, although sometimes the Boer sticks to his favourite drink of "kawfee" all through the twenty-four hours. The shops supply tea free to all their customers. If very thirsty you can go from store to store between eleven and half past, and get a cup of tea at each place! It's been done. One dorp storekeeper's wife told me she spent about five pounds a month on this form of entertainment.

If you ask anyone to tea in South Africa, you must state definitely whether you mean morning tea or the afternoon session. Owing to just this omission my first visitor arrived at eleven, just when I was all hot and flustered making cakes for her delectation at 4 p.m. Morning tea-parties are as popular among the housewives of the country as are afternoon affairs of the same kind in England. Guests take their knitting and their gossip with them, and the preparation of the midday dinner lies in the hands of the native servants for half the morning on these occasions. Then hubby, returning for his meal, sometimes gets the proverbial "burnt offering or bloody sacrifice". The native does not always shine at European cookery.

So it was over the elevenses at the store that we made our first friend in South Africa. He often came out to our farm to see us.

There was nothing to keep us in the dorp after our shopping was done, so having hired a battered old car and encrusted it heavily with our kit and purchases we set off on the seventeen-mile drive across the veld to our farm. We travelled in company with a crate of fowls, a kitten, a puppy, a darky maid (hastily acquired), and a bottle of hop yeast. A load conducive to flat tyres and a boiling radiator. The kitten, the pup, and the yeast were tokens of goodwill from the hotel-keeper's kind frau. The yeast was the most important. One must have bread. In case our first efforts at making it proved abortive, we bought two loaves to give our housekeeping a fair start. But after these were eaten there could be no running round the corner to a baker: after that we should be breadless unless the yeast did its job. With the nearest stores miles distant, often leagues away, everyone on South Africa's farms makes bread at home. Well, this bottle of yeast did its job much too soon. The singeing sun, and the mad leaping of the open car along the veld track, caused the yeast to work in a lively manner, until just as we roared up to our new homestead the cork flew off with a bang like gunfire welcoming royalty, and a jet of yeast shot up into the sunshine and descended with a slimy splash all over us. Welcome home with a salvo! We hastily recorked the bottle with a handkerchief to save what remained of the precious stuff.

Next day, amid the welter of unpacking and settling in, James and I made time to create our first loaves with our noses buried in the instructions kindly written out for us by the donor of the yeast. Guiltily we put just a little baking powder into the flour to make quite certain that the sponge should rise. But evidently the baking powder and the yeast had a civil war and killed each other, for the net result was a batch of marbled slabs which even the puppy ignored in favour of our shoes. Meantime the bought loaves had shrunk during our labouring to replace the staff of life. We simply must try again. It wasn't till we had finished the first sad experiment, and were rolling up our sleeves to sweat and toil again, that Katrina, our dusky domestic, spoke up.

"Missus, shall I make some bread for de missus?" quoth she.

"Katrina! Can you make bread?" we chorused, James and I.

"Ja, missus. Katrina make bread for de missus," said the damsel placidly. James glared.

"Then why the deuce didn't you say so before?" he yelled.

Katrina just nodded solemnly.

"Ja, baas. Katrina make bread for de missus," she reiterated. Happily for everyone, Katrina's understanding of English was limited, or there might have been back-chat, or even a giving of notice, following James's ensuing remarks. He had not really said "deuce" at all.

So with utmost nonchalance, and very black hands, Katrina made bread in future like the very best down pillows, and we hungered no more.

CHAPTER II

UNDER THE LACY SHADE OF FOUR PEPPER TREES, PLANTED CLOSE UP AGAINST THE whitewashed building itself, cowered the farmhouse with its flat, tin roof over five squat rooms which, supplemented by a tent, was to be our home for at least a

year. It was a temporary home which we had rented along with the surrounding veld of about 3000 morgen, or nearly 6000 acres in extent; a jumping-off ground where we could collect farm stock, knowledge of our new job in life, experience of the country, and an acquaintance with new neighbours, before we committed ourselves and our capital to a permanent undertaking. (James says that "undertaking" has an ominous sound!)

Following the making of bread, our next adventure was with the roof of our abode. It was so frivolously affixed that it blew off in the first high wind that came along—and high winds are mighty prevalent in the Karroo. Toiling in the sun, we retrieved our lid and replaced it more securely over the box-like structure of the homestead. To make assurance really sure, we strewed the entire roof's surface with large rocks and chunks of scrap-iron, lest we again be left open to the Southern Cross or an inimical sun. One often sees this form of decoration on the flat tin roofs of Karroo farmhouses, so we were not out of the fashion.

Inside, the low ceilings were of stretched, whitewashed calico, which sagged and billowed grotesquely in the gusts of hot air which puffed in through the sash windows. A divided door, familiar to every horse, led straight from the veld into the living-room, from which opened the other four rooms. A bedroom and the living-room boasted plank flooring, but the raftered, ceilingless kitchen, and the other two rooms, were mud-floored. They required to be smeared with dung each week or so.

This smearing of floors is done in many up-country homes, and although it is a filthy process to carry out it certainly gives to any mud floor a clean hard surface for a week or more. At the end of about that period the cracks appear, and the manure chips away and becomes dusty, so the floor must be resmeared.

Katrina kept our kitchen beautiful (if you can apply that adjective to a manure floor at all!) Weekly she collected a large tinful of sheep manure (obligingly supplied by our own animals), and mixed it with water into a thick paste. This mess she would then smarm all over the mud floor with sweeping circular movements of her brawny arms, after which she paddled out with a heavy squelch of bare feet, and left her handiwork to dry. Smearing-day, like Mother's washing-day in England, was our day for a cold feed, as no one could get near the range to do any cooking for several hours after Katrina's daub-and-splash campaign.

The veld house-frau's natural acceptance of smeared floors is deliciously illustrated in the story of the travelled South African lately returned to his own land, who was telling a backveld farmer's wife about London. London was little but a fairy-tale to the woman.

"And did you see the King of England's big house?" asked the simple soul.

"Ja, Tante, I saw Buckingham Palace," said the returned traveller.

"Is it a very, very big house?" the questioner went on.

"Oh yes! Very big. It has about a hundred rooms, I should guess," the traveller declared as if humouring a child.

"And has the King of England many cattle?" asked the farmer's frau. True to type in a stock-breeding district, she assessed wealth by the number of head possessed.

"Quite fifty cows," vowed the resourceful informant. The farmer's frau looked thoughtful for a moment, then shaking her head, said cannily:

"No, no, friend, you must be wrong somehow; one can't smear a hundred rooms with only fifty cows!" Nay, not even the King of England!

We had a rude shock in realizing that our new home had no bathroom. The only thing to do about it was to carry out ablutions in the kitchen. This meant that a zinc tub had to be planted in the middle of Katrina's precious smeared floor. This broke her heart, for the rim of the tub and our splashings could do

nothing but havoc to a surface of applied dung. Baths taken on the eve of smearing-day were the only ablutions Katrina could look upon with any tolerance or leniency.

"Why must de baas and missus have baths at all, missus?" she asked ingenuously one day.

"And why not, Katrina?" I countered. Katrina just grinned. You could just see her thinking, "These mad Uitlanders!"

Though the battered homestead of our rented farm stood bleak and wind-swept on a stony rise, there was a cool green garden two hundred yards down a hill at the back. Which is to say that after stumbling down a rocky trail, you came upon a fenced-in oasis. From a rickety gate a long trellis of vines, growing as freely as a Dorothy Perkins in England, led shadily to the lucerne lands, and to an old orchard. The lush lucerne was a joy to rest the eyes upon before raising them to the livid veld beyond the garden's boundary fence, dotted as the veld was to the dim blue horizon with those millions of twiggy little bushes. And the orchard charmed us with its promises of green figs, golden apricots, plums, and nectarines—not spreadeagled on any south wall, but growing in the form of cup-shaped trees, yielding greenness against the glare as well as fruit. This garden was, for all its lack of flowers and vegetables, until we put them in later, a little heaven of green, vivid amidst a tract of brown emptiness.

The garden was irrigated from an earth dam from which the farm animals also drank. The water came not from one of the ubiquitous boreholes of the Karroo, but from a natural spring which bubbled to the surface in a rocky hill near the house, and trickled its way between twenty-foot cliffs down to the basin by the garden. Half-way down the hill the cliffs flattened out and the streamlet widened and flowed through a deep pool. From this pool, some hundred yards downhill from the house, Katrina dipped out our drinking-water and all water needed for the homestead, and carried it home in buckets and four-gallon tins, balanced on her head. Katrina could about turn, and harangue anyone she met in a mighty flow of speech, with a bucket of water on her head and another in each hand, without spilling a drop.

After being on the farm about three months, we noticed the water in the buckets becoming daily more cloudy and bad-tasting. Before it had always been limpid and sweet. James investigated, and found that a few yards above the pool a dreadful dam had formed, through which all our drinking-water had been filtering. This dam consisted of tag-ends of dead mice, some swollen frogs, long-defunct bats, and other such delicacies, jammed in a mass with water-logged twigs and straws. The source of this pot-pourri was traced to an owl's nest in the miniature cliffs higher up. An indulgent mother owl, like many a human mamma, had tried to overfeed her offspring, and the wise owlets in the nest had cast overboard, to float down to our drinking-water hole, the surplus of their aldermanic feasts. The result for us was a bad scare, for enteric was abroad in the district at the time. We just bundled into old Lizzie and roared in to the dorp doctor for inoculation.

Old Lizzie, by the way, was one of our first second-hand purchases, since transport is as important as bread on a backveld farm.

In South Africa few people deem it necessary to boil drinking-water, but we decided to do it now—until we were no longer frightened, anyway. So, in a mixture of newly acquired Afrikaans-cum-English, I instructed Katrina to cook the daily supply of drinking-water first thing each morning, so that it might be cold for drinking during the heat of the day. I told her *why* the water must be boiled: she knew all about the danger of enteric. Yet one morning James caught her adding cold, unboiled water to the hot stuff, and asked her sulphurously what this meant. Placidly, Katrina explained.

"De missus, him ask now for a drink: Katrina made cold de water quick for de missus."

"But why do you think we told you that we must drink nothing but boiled water?" James demanded.

Katrina's black eyes rolled whitely as she raised them to meet the baas's glare.

"De baas and de good God know," was her pious rejoinder.

Should one have laughed or wept?

It was hard work bringing up Katrina and myself in the way we should go in the matter of housekeeping. Her first efforts at waiting at table resulted in a dish of scalding potatoes being tipped into James's lap, through which they filtered down on to the carpet: the self-same carpet with which James had returned with such pride from Irak, a Persian affair not accustomed to potatoes. So although Katrina always put her fat black thumbs into the soup when carrying soup plates, in the most approved manner of a Soho waiter, we decided that so long as she stayed with us dining must be done in family style, with all dishes on the table.

After all, waiting was rather much to expect from a jolly, woolly-headed savage who did not yet know even how to lay a table. After putting on the cloth wrong side up and crooked as an Edgar Wallace villain, Katrina would grasp a large fistful of mixed cutlery and proceed to deal the baas and myself a hand each. Thus the baas might find himself with a no-trumper of four cheese and two fish-knives, and five tea- and two coffee-spoons, while I would be dealt three fish-forks, one dessert-spoon, one butter-knife, and a long suit of tablespoons. She chose the crockery indiscriminately too, so that we were quite likely to find ourselves trying to keep a runny pudding within the bounds of a coffee saucer. Also the first day in "service" Katrina took our table napkins out at the end of the meal and used them for her dish-wiping. That seemed to her the proper ending for a napkin.

But gradually, while I rose from the comparatively simple roasting of a leg of mutton to the giddy heights of making a meat pie, Katrina also learnt that when milk on the stove started to boil over because we had both forgotten it, there were more hygienic ways of checking its ascent than by spitting into it! And in the end I persuaded her that a wooden spoon primarily intended for stirring the stew should not be used for scratching her head.

But having progressed so far, James and I suddenly suffered the fate of most employers of female labour the world over. Katrina left us to wed, rather tardily, the darky swain who was the father of her year-old infant. We had known nothing about the baby whom Katrina visited during her times off, for apparently the child was looked after by relatives in the native location. The location is a conglomeration of tin, mud and sacking huts, which duplicates every South African dorp, and which is the "native quarter" in the language of the newcomer. In the dorp you see the native as an individual working as store-boy, wagon-driver, or house servant; in the location they are to be seen *en masse*.

So Katrina left one morning to go up to the little mission church and be joined in holy matrimony to a dusky lad yclept June Roses, the ceremony being performed in a most decorous manner by their own parson. For Katrina and June Roses were Christian folk, and in spite of all prejudices against native Christian servants, we were sorry to lose Katrina. She had given us most of our first laughs, shocks, and willing service of our life in Africa, and we had found her always willing, honest, and cheerful.

It was not Christian Katrina but the husky heathen who succeeded her who drank up the soup as it cooked for dinner, and purloined cutlets from the frying-pan. But there was no domestic agency within several hundred miles, so we kept the new damsel, as we had been glad to get her after Katrina's departure. The devil, you know, when you get to know her, isn't too bad as a rule.

We got to know this one's comic tricks quite soon. For instance, we could always tell when she was fibbing. Her skin was too dark to show a blush, but just watch her bare brown toes! They wiggled like snakes in pain when their owner was trying to do the old soldier. And by the same token, she soon learnt our own weaknesses. Her giggles at our newly assumed Afrikaans, my culinary efforts, and James's various attempts to run a farm, were always spontaneous and plentiful. She one day watched me put a pound of salt into what I proudly and confidently hoped would be a nice "pound cake"—and just giggled. Then she giggled some more when we all tasted the cake.

The South African, black or white, is nothing if not cheerful; his, and her, sense of humour is tremendous. All the more so since they display that rare brand of humour which can make a man laugh against himself. One day I found our girl and a lady friend she had invited into the kitchen both doubled up with mirth because a bee had stung our domestic on the nose. Her nose was swollen mountainously and looked very funny, even to the girl herself. Even she could not miss seeing it at such close range when it was that size.

But, alas! we did not keep this girl long either. Her family was moving to pastures new. Literally that, for they were possessed of twenty goats, three donkeys, and five sheep, and therefore were by way of being farmers. And so once more we jolted into the dorp in search of another domestic.

A native domestic is made, not born. She generally arrives in the proverbial beads and smile, says "*Ja*" brightly to all questions relative to a knowledge of housework and cookery, and then proceeds to demonstrate a total ignorance and inefficiency coupled with an abounding will to learn.

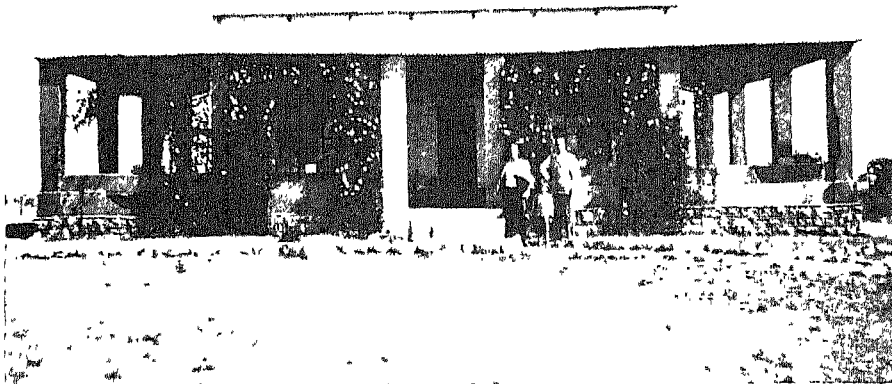
This time our new girl was called Sarah. She was about forty in age, but then, in South Africa a "girl" or a "boy" can be anything between fifteen and fifty, so Sarah was technically a girl. Below fifteen a girl is generally called a piccanin, and a boy an umfaans.

We called this girl the Great Sarah. She was a Hottentot dame, with the broad-nosed ugliness of her tribe. Over her I draw a veil—or would like to. She came to us with a minimum of clothing, little more than the above-mentioned beads and smile, and I had to dress her for a start. According to Kaffir custom, she always slept at night in the clothes given her to wear while working in the house, and I was hard put to it to keep pace with her wardrobe. She realized this herself, and turned up one morning in a tubular garment made of two sugar sacks joined up with raffia. Her lean brown shanks and knubbly black feet emerged from the bottom of the tube, and her kop, bound in a crimson doek, stuck out of the other end of the hessian creation. Her simian arms dangled out from two holes at each side of the sacking. She looked like an Egyptian mural. Even the kitten and the puppy found her enchanting, for they showed themselves very intrigued, and could not keep away from her. The only disadvantage to Sarah's chic model was that its tightness prevented her getting on to her knees to scrub or smear a floor.

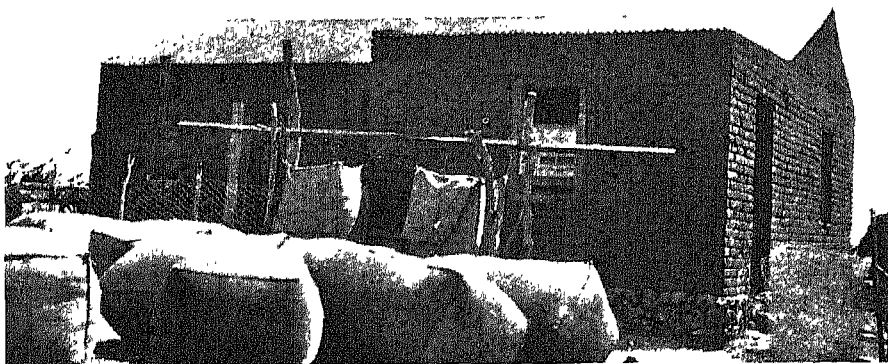
Sarah's brain would have rattled freely in the think-box of a day-old chick: one day she dashed out down to the garden to announce that the milk was boiling all over the range. It had never occurred to her to move the milkpan to safety. By the time we reached the kitchen together there was no milk and little saucepan left.

It was winter-time when Sarah was with us, and in spite of their horny appearance Sarah's feet evidently felt the cold. I walked into the kitchen one day to find her sitting with her extremities happily tucked into an oven such as the cookery books describe as "quick". The heat would have seared a joint of meat, but Sarah merely twiddled her ebony toes ecstatically and beamed ingenuously.

Like many domestics the world over, Sarah had home duties of her own.



The Homestead (Barenklau), which cost £450 in 1928. Unlike the Dutch-gabled houses of the Cape, there are no typical farmhouses in South-West Africa; we favoured wide verandas, but everyone had their own ideas.



Wool Bales. Shearing time means hard work, but is also a social occasion when neighbours arrive to help. Each bale weighs approximately 200 lbs.



A community birds' nest built in a camel-thorn tree. Housing two to three hundred birds, and with an entrance only at the bottom of the nest, they are made as a protection against snakes.



Merino Sheep. A good Merino gives about 8–10 lbs. of wool each shearing. Pre-war, when a farmer got 1s. a lb. for his wool, the Englishman paid £1 a lb. for his made-up suit in England !

Being an unwilling grass widow, she had the sole care of her numerous progeny, and really did little more than oblige me in her spare time, in the best manner of the English charlady. Finally, after a few months, we again suffered through the departure of our female labour. Sarah left to become reunited to her prodigal husband, who unexpectedly returned one day from matrimonial adventures in other parts of Africa. The entire family, pa, ma, and piccaninnies, departed bedecked in wonderful raiment created from some of my discarded frocks.

After Sarah, luck gave us two Basuto women, though how they came to be in a region so far from their own Basutoland, one cannot say. The Zulus and Basutos make the best house servants in South Africa, so considerable peace and comfort followed the engagement of the two mammies. Anna and Elsa were twin sisters, devoted to each other and to the one husband they shared. We puzzled over the exact relationships of their respective infants, of which there were many. These girls' black faces were a mass of red and indigo tattooing. It seemed rather repulsive just at first, but we soon got accustomed to it when its ugliness was discounted day after day by the cheerful grins that ever played over their shiny faces. They were both very easily amused, like all intelligent people, and it was great fun when one pointed out the ways of the white man's housekeeping to them, to see them stand hand in hand, roll their great brown eyes at each other, shrug, spread their palms, and break into a chuckle.

One day I asked Anna to catch a fowl for dinner, thinking she would follow the late Katrina's method of throwing a handful of grain on the ground and stalking the birds from the rear as they fed. Anna, however, pinned up her voluminous skirts and bade Elsa do the same. When they were ready, they pointed out a selected bird to each other, clasped hands, and then in double harness set off at a steady jog-trot round and round the veld about the house, with their miserable and bewildered victim stepping out in a lively manner ahead of them. Slowly but inexorably they ran the bird down till it dropped, and they were about ready to do the same. Then, breathless and triumphant, they chopped off its head, and laid a flapping, writhing corpse at my feet. I fled. And that to them was the best joke yet they had enjoyed in a white man's house.

The twins soon became quite quick and efficient in the routine work, and only on special occasions was a *faux pas* committed. They never could distinguish between a salver and a saucepan lid: both were round and shiny—good enough. So more than one caller was presented with a cup of tea balanced on a saucepan lid. Elsa was kitchen-cum-wash-girl, and Anna house-cum-parlourmaid. So it was the latter who was once guilty of serving custard in James's shaving-mug. To her mind it was as capable of holding custard or any other liquid as the milk-jug.

CHAPTER III

WITH THE CAPABLE ASSISTANCE OF THE BASUTO TWINS HOUSEKEEPING PROBLEMS were being solved one by one. But the flat drinking water still worried us. Soda-water was prohibitive here at sixpence a bottle, plus cartage over the seventeen miles which divided us from the dorp. Yet we could not bear thirst any longer in a dry land. At last one day the problem seemed to solve itself in the discovery of a recipe for home-made beer in a South African magazine. It called for fresh orange juice, peel, hops, raisins, lemon essence, yeast, and about a dozen other

ingredients, but we eagerly collected the lot, and set about our brewing. It was a toilsome process involving much boiling, straining, and reboiling. But at last three dozen amber bottles of assorted shapes, from large medicine bottles to vinegar bottles, stood finished and corked. The book of words advised tying down the corks with wire or string, as the beer was guaranteed very potent. Obediently we followed these instructions. Then proudly we placed our private brewery stock in a row on the larder's top shelf, and I admonished the thirsty James.

"The recipe says they must stand for at least a month," I said firmly. To which my partner replied, "What a hope!"

What a hope indeed! Three nights later, sleeping on our rickety camp-beds, we were awakened about midnight by what sounded like a series of deafening revolver shots, and a crashing of glass, as if some ghostly visitants were potting at windows for a midnight lark.

James leapt out of bed. "The Zulus are on us!" he declared flippantly, and straightway plunged through the bedroom doorway armed grimly with a tennis racquet. This was the sort of emergency when you don't stop to put in your teeth. (The Zulus are tough guys, anyway.) Groping for a kimono and matches, and thinking of all the terrible adventures the fiction books prophesy for one in Darkest Africa—and it was mighty dark at the moment—I quickly followed him. Feeling the need of a weapon, I grabbed a sunshade in my right hand, and held a candle aloft, like the Statue of Liberty, in my other hand. It seemed unnecessarily foolish to chance treading on a snake, even if we expected to be done in by the Zulus, anyway. Besides, it was not obvious to a startled mind at that moment that Zululand and its inhabitants were a good many hundred miles away.

Two more loud reports made us jump, so that I nearly dropped the candle. Then in the silence which followed there began a sizzling sound which made me cry out, "A snake!" drop the sunshade, and gather knee-high my scant attire. (This was worse than any mouse!) Right enough, something dark and sinuous squirmed from under the ill-fitting larder door. The horrible hissing gurgle continued, and the dark length writhed towards our bare feet over the uneven earth floor.

Then a smell as of ten thousand breweries smote our noses, and we looked at each other in dismay more real than any Zulus could have evoked.

"The beer!" we gasped out together.

James threw open the larder door, all thought of Zulus and snakes forgotten, and I raised the candle aloft. Beer splashed the walls from top to bottom of the room, dripped frothily from shelf to shelf, and ran in streams across the floor and under the door. Beer stench filled the air, and broken glass the larder. Two bottles only remained intact. In our zeal we had filled the bottles much too full to allow the potent stuff room for fermentation, and since the corks were tied down, according to the rules of the recipe, the bottles had had no option but to burst, poor things.

"You're some brewer!" said James. Adam would put it on to Eve, wouldn't he? But we both sat down on a sack of flour and laughed tearfully till we ached.

"But I say," James went on when we had partially recovered, and were dabbing the tears of this midnight mirth from our eyes, "we can't risk what's left of the stuff; let's drink it now." He picked up a bottle gingerly, as if it might bite him, while I ran to the kitchen for a corkscrew and glasses. But the corkscrew was not necessary: the second the string was removed from the neck of the bottle the cork shot upwards on a fountain of beer and hit the ceiling. The stuff foamed all over our hands and wrists, and thence, more or less, into the two glasses I thrust underneath the eruption.

There was no blowing off the froth; it was all froth. We clinked tumblers, and quoted, "Here's to good old beer, drink it down," and there in the darkest hours

of night we sat on a flour-sack in the poky little larder and sucked and licked up a pint of tepid hop foam. Frankly it tasted vile, and a drink of nice flat water after it was most welcome, before returning to bed after banishing the Zulus.

There still remained half a bottle of alleged beer which we did not care about drinking next day. From sheer sentiment for our creation we were averse to throwing it out. In the end I regarded it as hop yeast, on the principle that $x = y$, and made bread with it. Those loaves soared up like our late Katrina's balloons, the lightest bread imaginable.

In order to cool the drinking-water, which seemed always tepid as well as flat in taste, we enquired about "water monkeys". These are red clay, porous carafes, through which water slowly oozes, and cools by the process of evaporation. They were to be bought in the dorp, but at the shocking price of 8/6 each. Pottery is scarce and dear in the Karroo owing to the district's sandy soil, which is totally unsuitable for this craft. Hence our tin roofs (held on by rocks), instead of tiles. But just when we were in despair of ever having a decent cold drink again in life, a kindly Boer lady put us wise to the South African water-bag of tough canvas. These bags of various capacity are filled with water and hung in the breeze on the stoep: the water oozes slowly through the canvas, and is soon icy cold. We promptly sent in for an outsize in water-bags, and happily thirsted no more.

As well as a succession of girls, we had taken into our employ several boys to herd our sheep, mow lucerne, and help James to be a farmer. The first boy to come to us was a little wiry Hottentot clothed in the ubiquitous Kaffir smile and a mass of rags.

"What's your name?" James demanded. The newcomer grinned afresh.

"Gladstone, baas," he said, almost as if he could appreciate the joke. And Gladstone he remained till the sad day he went from us long after. Thus some humorist had flippantly named him in the past, as the white man in Africa, who cannot get his tongue around native names, will often do, and so he was content to be in his dealings with all subsequent white men whom he encountered.

In making his bargains with us, Gladstone had requested boots and some clothes in addition to his pay and his rations. So as this is quite usual and in order, we set about outfitting our Gladstone. His present attire made the matter urgent, and so solved instantly the problem as to what was to become of James's tropical mess kit, now that he was no longer a soldier.

Unfortunately, James was tall and large, while Gladstone was a miniature man. But this did not worry Gladstone. He accepted James's recent glory with delight, and was the last to notice that his tough little frame rattled around grotesquely in his new sartorial magnificence, and was just oozing with pride on first dressing up. He had polished the buttons and badges till they glittered bewitchingly, and had not omitted to strap the silver spurs over his farm boots. Into these rugged boots he had tucked the ends of the long—much too long—overalls. He wore no shirt, so that between the short jacket, which hung in folds from his narrow shoulders, and the tops of his overalls was a horizontal belt of dark-brown skin. The winged collar was on back to front, and the tie was now an elegant bow in his disreputable felt hat, from which the favourite ostrich feather waved jauntily. Lastly, a hairy chest yawned darkly where a white piqué, pearl-buttoned waistcoat should have been. James had evidently forgotten to hand over the waistcoats, and great was Gladstone's joy when the wonderful garments were dug out and presented to him. In the completed get-up Gladstone henceforth lived, slept, and daily herded his flocks on the sand-blown veld, till the snowy marvel that had been James's mess kit quickly turned to dusty biege, then brown,

and ended in sheer grime of all shades. The average native of South Africa wears his clothes till they begin to fall off him. Then he puts on over the old rags such new glories as his employer sees fit to supply. The final stages of rot are therefore hidden from the eye, though, alas, not from the nose!

Gladstone was a splendid and faithful fellow. For eight years he remained with us as a first-rate shepherd, and a willing peg for all James's cast-off clothes.

Gladstone's name and incongruous attire were by no means unique. A native has little sense of the ludicrous where his personal appearance is concerned, and one may see him going placidly about his work on the veld or in the dorp clothed in a Tom Mix hat, riding breeches, and an evening tail-coat; leather leggings, plus-fours, and an antique dinner-jacket; or else a lurid Fair Isle jumper, ancient Panama hat, bare feet, and flannels past all recognition or description.

Their names vie too in originality with that of our Gladstone. Months of the year, historical characters, edibles, and all sorts of things are pressed into service when names are being chosen, either flippantly by the white man for his employees, or in all seriousness by the "Europeanized" native. So we get "July", "June Roses", "Music", "Biscuit", and so on. Sometimes, in admiration for his baas, a native will call one of his infants after his master, annexing the surname as well as any first names. It's apt to be embarrassing, perhaps!

Shortly after Gladstone's coming we took on another boy whom we labelled Disraeli, for the most obvious reason, though neither of our henchmen in the least resembled his respective prototype.

So often we find ourselves laughing at the native—his appearance, his speech, and his mannerisms. Have we the right to do this? I think so, because the native has not any doubt at all as to his right to laugh at us and our ways, and daily does so quite openly. Frequently we laugh together about each other, and there is nothing but fun in the laughter. We are quits!

It was while on an overseas visit to England, when visiting a cinema to see the film "The Four Feathers", that the average, even well-educated English person's outlook towards South Africa and its native inhabitants was revealed to me. During the scene when the Fuzzy-Wuzzies charged straight for the audience—one could see the retreating tracks of the ciné-camera ahead of them—my girl friend clutched my arm in the darkness and whispered hoarsely:

"Just look at the fierce devils—and yet you say you like living in South Africa!"

It was difficult to assure her of the complete peace and normality of life in South Africa today, and to remind her that this film did not deal with Southern Africa in any case.

The word "native" is so loosely used in England as to be ridiculous. If, during a walk on the veld, you meet a group of *South African* natives, they don't charge at you! They merely smile. They never fail to do so. And if you should speak to them, appreciation of your attention is shown by the most polite replies. Ask the way to anywhere and every help will be offered. Although never servile or cringing, and always dignified, there is at the same time a humility in their manner towards the white man today that is heart-wringing.

When you give a native anything, especially a present at Christmas-time, he has a way of holding out both hands, palms upwards, to receive your gift, which has a suggestion of supplication. It is pretty to see the children do it, but somehow you wish they would indulge in the natural snatch of a European child. So little delights them that giving them a present is a real joy. The women love a length of bright cloth, the men a twist of tobacco, the piccanins some sweets, the more brutal in colour the better.

In spite of their innate and fundamental courtesy, the native's reaction to a gift is always as naive and transparent as a child's. You know at once the exact

extent of his pleasure. One sunny but frosty morning I felt sorry for a pot-bellied piccanin of three years on the place, who was running about without a shred of clothing, and I looked out some woollies for him. His mother realized the good intention, but laughed heartily as she held up the garments one by one for inspection.

"Missus," she said, "he's not cold. He would smother if I put these on him!" She much preferred to help herself to a couple of checked kitchen cloths to make the piccanin a gay shirt—not for warmth or convention, but because, like all her kind, she dearly loved a cheerful effect.

The piccanin's own attitude towards clothes can be amusing. A friend told us this story. A little native boy, of about seven years or so, had accompanied his white master and his own children to a river to bathe. Arrived there, little black Hendriks gaily threw off his much-patched shirt, which was his sole garment, and the pride of his mammy's heart, and dived into the water. Quite unconscious of his nakedness, he ran in and out of the water, and up and down the river bank, until it was time to go home. Then he came out of the water, picked up his shirt, and coyly retired behind a bush to dress!

James bought his sheep at drought prices. It is not altogether unfortunate to start farming sheep in South Africa in the middle of a drought: you can buy stock at nice low prices, because the farmers, by selling, can theoretically solve their problem of how to keep the animals alive on an almost entire absence of grazing. Obviously the buyer, after his first pleasure of paying out a smaller cheque instead of a large one, is faced with the problem he has just bought along with the stock. You cannot have it both ways anywhere in this world. However, there is no point in a sheep farm without stock, so we thanked our luck about the low price (17/6 a head) and trusted in Gladstone and his satellites to do the rest. Truly, Gladstone was a rare fellow for finding grazing; he seemed able to smell out by instinct any good patch that still remained on our parched 6000 acres. The sheep were bought at what was jestingly called the farmers' Stock Exchange—the local hotel bars. There is more business done in this Karroo thirstland over a cup of tea, or, better still, a glass of beer, than in any of its offices.

So now the homestead and farm, if not altogether running on model lines according to English ideas of farming, were got going in the direction which is the perfection aimed at by South African farmers dictated by conditions in South Africa.

With Anna and Elsa functioning well in the homestead, I used my freedom, when possible, to take long walks in the cool of the day, either alone or with James. Sometimes we rode, and sometimes we went farther afield still, with Lizzie to carry us. We wanted to see something of the Karroo.

"What did you think of South Africa?" an Englishman was once asked on returning to Europe.

"Mile on miles and miles of hang-all," was his unimaginative reply about this far-spreading land of free, vast spaces.

On hearing this story while living on the Karroo, I went out for a walk one calm evening to see if something worth while could be found in the miles of hang-all—the treeless plains rimmed along the far horizons by clear-cut mountains.

I found colour—glorious colour—everywhere. As I stood on rising ground, the sun was lowering in the west, a Catherine wheel of crimson. The brown and grey dolorite kopjes were turning violet, and throwing long indigo shadows across the flat stretches of veld that were rainbow-tinted in the lights and shades on the innumerable low-growing bushes. To the left a pure white farm homestead peered from between some gentle green willow trees. Before them a blue duck-pond clearly reflected a fleecy, fish-shaped cloud of amber, and the silver of the steel windmill on its banks. A long line of tamarisks, flame and amber in foliage,

rose from beyond the house. A red-brown ribbon of road wound over the plains to a distant dorp, whose painted roofs dotted the far away veld just where an azure sky paled to lemon and translucent green. And over all the plunging sun had thrown a transparent veil of warm gold. Gold is the loveliest colour—even if it does not line the seams of one's purse. It is given free to all each evening at sunset in South Africa.

There was enchanting colour everywhere. And this is the first of the jolly things South Africa can teach anyone: always to look for the compensation in what is apparently dreary emptiness. Here, in the semi-arid regions of the Karroo, it is the magic of colouring which is in all desert places. Not only is it the Karroo's compensation, but one of Nature's universal compensations, that the rare air in the arid or semi-arid places of the world always produces the most magnificent colour effects, with amazing sunrises and sunsets. Which forces me to say that, although one would love to dwell on these lovely colourings of the thousands of square miles of Karroo plains and plateaux, it is wiser to be practical and state the fact again that the whole district is semi-arid.

Yet it has its practical compensations too. Its dry climate is eminently suitable for merino sheep, and there are the fertile soil, the healthy air, the open life never spoiled by the wretched words "weather permitting", and the amazing friendliness and warm sense of hospitality bred in the nation's people by the difficulties the veld imposes on all alike. The newcomer moans at first, but before long he learns to love the land of his adoption, for it is very lovable. Else how has South Africa become the great country she is? Such nations are built on love and loyalty.

Often, on our exploring expeditions, the rough track which Lizzie followed most bumpily wound monotonously for many miles through the little Karroo bushes spaced with almost maddening regularity two or three feet apart. Then, just as the steady roar of the old car and the eternal sameness of the country flying past had lulled both James (the driver) and myself into a comatose state, we would come suddenly over a low rise to a man-made oasis, a lonely farmstead, complete with reservoir and wind-pump, pepper trees and blue-gums; a little group of man-made things set down in Nature's emptiness like a child's toy farm in the centre of a vast brown carpet. And a couple of hundred yards down the slope signs of humanity were evidenced again in a garden, separated as usual from the homestead by a gap of brown veld.

On so many farms in South Africa the garden must be a fenced-in plot apart from the house, and not a complement of the dwelling. This is because the garden, which depends for its existence on irrigation, must be low-lying, while it is preferable for many reasons that the house should stand on higher ground, free from mosquitoes, snakes, and perhaps an occasional flood at those times when, after a year or two of drought, the skies release the arrears of rainfall in one big deluge.

In other ways too the scheme is a wise one. There is the native to consider. A girl or a boy has rarely been known to shut a door or a gate, so that our servants in their comings would too often invite farm stock to partake of our precious greenery. Marauding goats and donkeys would gambol and feed among the hard-won zinnias and cosmos, and chew up the fruits of our sweating labour. That these things are hard won is known by everyone who has ever stood out in the blazing sunshine to irrigate a Karroo garden. No wonder a South African school-boy, in an essay on irrigation, once wrote that "Karoo farmers cultivate their fields and gardens with irritation"!

One evening as darkness fell, while James and I were motoring over the veld, we had a breakdown miles from home, but fortunately near a little brown house. A sudden sand-storm hurtled down on us, as sand-storms do in the Karroo at any

time of the day or night at certain seasons. So we decided to abandon Lizzie and make for shelter. With heads down, and smarting eyes nearly shut, we stumbled the half mile up the road to the cottage. It proved to be a tiny two-roomed place, plastered outside and in with plain mud, and it was inhabited by a dear old Darby and Joan. The old man was a "bywoner", a "poor white", acting as farm manager for an outpost, or camp, under the general manager, or owner, of the farm. There is much to be said about the poor-white of South Africa. Many of them are degenerates, or the children of such, but many at least are the victims of misfortune. We felt sure this old couple were in the second category. In the old days South Africa was a hard land, which either made a man or broke him. There seemed to be no mean.

The old people made us very welcome. When we explained Lizzie's behaviour the old Boer shook his great head and muttered into his patriarchal beard that these modern devil machines were never any good. It was no use explaining that our Liz was far from modern; she was still undeniably a devil machine. She had just proved the fact by behaving like the Devil. On the backveld any unknown contraption is believed to be devil-infested, especially to the native mind. Cars, gramophones, cameras, and above all the wireless, are all taken to be quite satanic. Yet such is the fascination of things which mystify that all these things, with the addition of watches and sewing machines, are dearly coveted by the black peoples of South Africa.

But this Boer told us with pride that he had never been in a train, car, or ship, and never wanted to go either. The ox-wagon, that old ship of the veld, was good enough for him, with the use perhaps of a cart and donkeys, or a saddle-horse if he were in a hurry or travelling on a matter of life and death.

There are many comic stories told in South Africa of backveld innocence in mechanical matters. One old couple, after a lifetime spent tucked away from modern life, had need to undertake a train journey for the first time in their lives. The good frau had heard that a train, like time and tide, waits for no man, so as her man drove the slow lumbering ox-wagon over the hundred miles they had to travel to the railway, she urged and nagged him to hurry. Imagine her dismay then, on reaching the station after days of hard going over the veld, to find no train in sight.

"I told you it would be gone, Jan," she wept.

"How do you know it's gone, frau?" her old man asked.

"Why, look! Can't you see the spoor it has left?" The old lady, wise in veld-craft and trailing, pointed to the railway track! Since infancy she had been accustomed to trace every creature and vehicle by its spoor. The Boer, like the Kaffir, is as cute on the trail as any Red Indian, and can even tell, from bent grasses and sticks along the ribbon-like spoor of a snake, in which direction the reptile has travelled, where the newcomer might not even notice the presence of a snake at all.

Another story which purports to show the flights of a simple backveld mind gains its point, I am afraid, by exaggeration. An elderly Boer, who had lived all his life farming about a hundred and fifty miles from everywhere, unaccountably turned all modern and decided to buy a car. The first day he drove off from his home in this chariot his good frau was more than perturbed—she was frantic.

"Goodness knows," she wailed to her daughter, "where Opa will get to in that thing—or if he will ever get home again at all."

The old dame's anxiety increased through the day, and when evening came she was just making up her mind that she was now a widow, when, incredibly, a droning sound was heard overhead. Mother and daughter rushed out of their lonely cottage on the veld and stared skywards. Then the old lady gasped;

"Look, Marie! *Allemachte!* Just look where the old baas has got to now!"
 The two gazed in awe at an aeroplane!
 What an advertisement for any make of car!

So the bywoner, who was our host for one night, and James talked at cross purposes, in a mixture of two different tongues, about disselbooms, crank-shafts, carburettors, and wheel-blocks, their smoothest point of contact being lubricating oil. Meanwhile the wife prepared supper, the while she exchanged an occasional smile with me, because we could exchange few words. My Afrikaans and her English mixed about as easily as oil and water.

After a supper of samp (which is Indian corn crushed and boiled), cold pot-roast of goatling, Boer meal bread (brown bread) and coffee, I began to wonder about sleeping accommodation and nightwear. But it was all too simple for words. How the sophisticated do clutter themselves up with hampering conventions about how to live and sleep! God gave us sleep, but man invented the ritual known as "going to bed". This couple happily knew nothing of it.

James and I were given the run of the kitchen-living-room, while the Boer and his frau retired to the other room beyond the half-walls which rose to within two feet of the ten-foot tin roof, leaving the flat wall top to act as a shelf. A centrally-placed aperture which connected the two rooms was quite innocent of door or curtain, and plainly revealed the pile of animal skins and rugs on the mud floor which awaited its owners' slumbers.

The old people wished us good night and, having lent us rugs, suggested kindly that we should probably sleep best on the shaggy Angora goat-skin mat under the deal dining-table. Then they passed into their own room. There, before our astonished eyes, the pair sat down, one on each side of the pile of bedding, kicked off their veldschoen, and simultaneously rolled back on to their pillows, side by side. They pulled up a patchwork quilt to cover them, and slept. It had taken them barely thirty seconds to go to bed, and James and I had learnt why a backveld bywoner does not have a crease, but many creases, in the trousers he wears by day and night.

In the morning we breakfasted off mealie pap (corn meal porridge), the national dish in South Africa of native and white man alike, followed by bread, and coffee with goat's milk. The bread we all dipped into our coffee according to veld custom, when butter is a luxury at 3/6 a pound in times of drought.

After breakfast we said good-bye and thanks, most gratefully, and went off to tinker with Lizzie. One generally offers nothing for hospitality on these occasions, for the backveld Boer can be very proud. It is always understood here that folks stranded on the road, or putting through a long trek, shall receive not only every assistance, but hospitality as well.

The quick-running motor-car and train of modern times have done something to undermine this spirit of mutual help and friendly trustfulness between traveller and homesteader, for those who must take advantage have increased in numbers, and the strain on the givers is more considerable. But the spirit still survives strongly. It can be understood how the tradition first arose in the old days before rapid road and rail transport was known, when people had to cover hundreds of miles far from shelter and food, with animal transport as the only means of getting along over South Africa's huge distances.

The only form of help for which a farmer will charge is for watering a herd or flock of animals trekking through his farm. Water is so precious that, in the drier districts at all events, the farmer cannot afford to give free drinking to hundreds of strange stock. Therefore he generally asks 6*d.* or 9*d.* a hundred (according to the scarcity of water) for sheep, and more, of course, for cattle and horses. He

must do this to compensate himself for the expenses of well-drilling or digging, and for upkeep of dams and windmills. But the owner, or the man in charge, is never charged by the farmers along his route of trek for any board and lodging he receives from them. Indeed, if every farmer's wife had a half-crown for every free meal she has dispensed to blank strangers passing her home there would be no poor farmers in the country!

Once during this terrible drought a herd of five hundred cattle came through our place just when we had had no wind to turn the windmills at the outposts for nearly ten days, and the spring which watered the home camp and garden was put to a severe strain. The same state of affairs had ruled on the other farms the herd had passed through during the last several days. The drover in charge told us the cattle were mad for water, and implored us to supply him. Out in the sun the cattle lowed and moaned, and the native herds with them found it tough work to prevent them stampeding down to the muddy coolness of our earth dam.

"What about your other camps?" the distracted drover asked. Doubtfully, for we had inspected the outposts daily, we rode with the man to another camp a mile away, the cattle following us in a haze of dust. Solemnly James peered over the dam wall. The water was terribly low, and there was not a sign of wind to turn the mill which fed the reservoir. For how much longer could our own sheep hold out if wind held off after we had watered these thirst-maddened cattle? When would the wind rise again? We asked ourselves these questions while the drover anxiously studied our faces to see if we would relent.

Then he pulled a handful of notes from his pocket.

"I'll pay anything," he declared, thrusting the notes at James. Money was not so scarce yet—only water and grazing.

James nobly thrust the notes aside, and said:

"I'll give you two troughs."

The big valve was turned, and the water flowed into the circular trough which ran round the reservoir. The cattle, which had smelt the water, went madder than ever. They surged forward, and it became terrible work to draft them in any order at all for their ration. They all wanted to be first, and charged and fought and became dangerous, so that James yelled to me to draw clear and stay clear. Only the native boys, with their irrepressible love of fun, saw any joke in the business. They galloped around hallooing with mirth as they tried to control the struggling herd.

When the last sip had been sucked up the bewildered cattle looked around in a stupefied way. Was there to be no more? They did not understand this rationing idea. But it had been better than nothing, and the beasts refused to move a yard until the cool of sunset, when at last their herdsmen persuaded them to get on with the trek. In the meantime the drover and his natives had been fed and refreshed at our homestead.

Next day, when we thought we had seen the last of the poor things, a large cloud of dust rolled up towards our farm again, and from out of it came the bellowing of cattle and the thud of hooves. When their drover rode up, we found it was the same outfit. The cattle had broken all control, and had insisted on careering back to us, the only people who had been able to give them anything to drink for many days. They charged past the house, and off to the outpost where they had drunk the day before, and milled frenziedly around the dam until sunset. By this time we were all frantically worried and sympathetic, and did not know what to do.

As the sun sank, and the air cooled, a thin whistling sound merged with the lowing of the pathetic beasts. With joy, we knew a sandstorm was coming; joy, because this meant wind. That night, when the veld lay blue-white in the moon-glare, the cattle drank and drank, and their wretched owner's troubles were

ended. And we slept in a filthy house, with our eyes and ears full of sand, yet relieved and happy. After all, nothing had been lost to the cattle-man but a day's trek to be done a second time. Yet he had stood in great danger of losing his all as represented by that herd of five hundred. Such a little thing as a few puffs of wind often draws the fine line between success and failure.

As we left the old Darby and Joan, and walked away down the road, we looked again at the fenced patch of ground which was a garden that had provided our supper and breakfast: the samp, the Boer meal, and mealie meal, not to mention the green lucerne grown for the goats which had given us milk for the coffee and porridge. For that matter, good as it had tasted, Mevrouw's coffee itself may have come from this garden too. Many of the poorer people in this country make excellent *ersatz* coffee from mixtures of roasted mealies, burnt brown bread, baked roots of various sorts, and from dried aloe leaves.

Which reminds me of the one reason why the experienced Boer can live plentifully on the veld where the migrant from Europe sometimes fails. The Boer farmer is practically self-supporting on his land; the newcomer too often likes to look upon himself as a one-crop business man, and neglects the little sidelines which make all the difference in times of slump, drought and other adversity. The Boer, while giving his first attention to the stock or crop which brings in his main income, also takes a real interest in his housekeeping, to the extent of giving a proper proportion of his time and energy to producing most of the things his larger needs. He supplies his frau with the raw materials from which she makes their own soap, candles, raisins, preserves, canned fruits and dried, cured and pickled meats, etc. The Boer cures his own leather and makes his own harness, as well as the shoes his family wears. He puts to the most wonderful uses such things as empty paraffin tins, packing-cases, wire, and sacking, from which he and his family evolve water-buckets, furniture, cushions, upholstery, and dozens of necessities. I never realized how warm could be a bed quilt made of several layers of finely stitched newspaper, covered with sateen, until I tried sleeping under one in a Karroo farmhouse.

The newly arrived European, on the other hand, holds the idea that he must make enough money to buy all these things. Consequently the Jewish and Dutch storekeepers throughout the land welcome him as a godsend. It is the settler's misfortune, this mistaken idea, for apart from missing all the fun of contriving, Mr. and Mrs. Settler pay all too dearly for the goods which they might have for next to nothing. The storekeeper of South Africa is rarely content with less than 100 per cent profit, and sometimes even more, on anything he sells. To give just one example: I have bought dried fruit direct from a farmer at the rate of twelve pounds for two shillings, and been asked to pay one shilling per pound for that same fruit when enquiring about it at the local stores! So it can be seen that time, energy and ingenuity are much more valuable to the settler, once he has settled, than money itself.

These facts began to trickle in on James and myself as we looked at the bywoners' well-stocked lands. That patch of emerald in the drought-stricken barrenness so often represents all the difference between want and plenty in the dry years. We knew there were plenty of these man-made oases dotted all over the Karroo, and hidden by the gentle undulations of the veld.

In fairness to the storekeepers just mentioned, it must be admitted that they are obliged to charge high prices to protect themselves, because nearly always they have to give long credit. Many farmers get their annual income in one lump at the end of the shearing season: so the storekeeper knows that he too must wait until then for his payment. He must, in fact, give a year's credit. Also the farmer is

notoriously easygoing over money matters. The system of paying up only once yearly makes him feel very free and wealthy in between whiles—until the reckoning approaches. Then, if he cannot meet his debts, the storekeeper can take a bond on his farm, and that is the thin end of a wedge, the thin beginning of ruin for the farmer and the way to riches for the storekeeper. There is a method in the latter's apparent madness in giving long credit with such good grace to landowners with no other security except their lands and flocks. One can best show how the business works by giving an illustration.

On a farm we knew there lived an old woman and her five sons. The old woman was the owner of the place. Since South Africa knows little of entailed property, the four younger sons, instead of leaving home and making careers for themselves, simply squatted on the farm year after year, along with the eldest brother, and waited for a share of the farm when the old woman died. Even if the property were willed to just one of the brothers, the other four would still stay on with him. In time they would all five have wives and children, and the homestead would become like a warren. But meanwhile they obtained all their food and farm necessaries not produced by themselves from the local storekeeper. Bad times came through drought and slumping markets, and the family found they could not pay the considerable debt they had contracted. So the storekeeper took a bond on their farm. Indolence, helped by a locust swarm, finished things off: the family still could not pay its swollen store-bill of years, and it could not pay the interest on the bond, let alone anything more. The storekeeper took a second bond, and, to cut down a long story, eventually acquired the farm. He added to his interests as a landowner, and South Africa became possessed of five more penniless, untrained, useless, poor whites.

One sees this happen so often that "tick" as one of the three curses of the country becomes painfully obvious. In so many dorps the store keeper is the wealthiest man in the district, and in so many cases he has acquired his money by carrying the farmers on his shoulders just so long as it suited him. Then he puts them down and says, "Your money or your farm, please," very politely, but very firmly. The storekeeper is not a bit to blame; his dealings are perfectly legal and honest. He gives the fool farmer no more than is deserved. In fact he very often lets him off rather lightly. The blame for this "bad luck" lies entirely with the farmer, who too often uses that facile argument that to borrow is "good business which pays in the long run". They get away with it if the seasons favour them, but a succession of unexpected happenings will probably put "finis" to them. Pay cash or go without, and contrive what you cannot afford to buy, is a law which should hold good even more strongly here than anywhere else, because tick is so often and so temptingly offered.

Many storekeepers also run bars, bottle stores, and licensed hotels in conjunction with their shops; a "Stock Exchange" on the spot is a great advantage to a man who deals in animals and land as well as in groceries, drapery, and farm requisites.

It would seem that the moral is, let the newcomer to this country start with storekeeping, and farm later if he still wishes it. Why plunge straight into farming? The real fact is that to succeed in storekeeping needs as much hard work and concentration as farming or anything else in life. Foolish farmers don't grow on every bush for the benefit of the storekeepers.

The incoming Englishman has his own peculiar point of view. Just arrived from his little old England, chock full of its social inhibitions, he fails at first to realize the magnificent democracy which has always ruled in South Africa, long before England began pompously to use the word in 1939. So often he is horrified at keeping a shop, or getting behind a pub bar. For some reason unfathomable he likes to forget that he has just come from an island described by Napoleon as "a

nation of shopkeepers". He wants to start where the storekeeper so often leaves off. For it is only when the storekeeper has retired from business that he sometimes goes on to the veld to build a nice home and settle on one of the farms he has got through the blessings (to him) of tick.

This is, Heaven knows, not meant to discourage any would-be farmer. But a settler is advised to start with a sufficiency of common sense, capital, and a determination to learn the rules for walking in the strait and narrow path said to lead to success as well as righteousness.

CHAPTER IV

AS NEW ARRIVALS WE WELCOMED ALL VISITORS, BEING EVERY BIT AS INTERESTED in them as they were in us.

One of our first visitors was a worthy Boer farmer from the near veld. He trundled up to our house one day en route to the dorp with a wagonload of pumpkins and melons for sale. He had dinner with us, and we were relieved to discover that he spoke very good English. On arrival he shook hands with James and murmured his name, "Cilliers". And James responded with his patronymic. That handshake and exchange of surnames is rigid etiquette. All Boers, even those living the roughest, most lonely lives in the blue, have good manners. To be sure, no Boer is what we call a "lady's man", who jumps up to open doors all day, or anticipates the want of a cushion. But there is about each and all of them a dignity and a respect for the feelings of others, springing from their own innate self-respect and self-confidence. Their manners are genuine, and are prompted by good hearts. Never are they the superficial manners, or cynical mannerisms, of the drawing-rooms of so-called civilization.

As James carved the joint, the Boer stared pensively at the meat with piercing blue eyes under heavy white brows. "*Ja!* Truly, that leg of goat reminds me of the year—that dreadful year—when all my Angora goats got water on the knee." (Was it water on the knee? I forget what animal disease he mentioned.) At all events, it was some leg infirmity of which he was reminded by our innocent dinner. And there was no deceiving this old connoisseur about the fact that we were eating up a few surplus goats to save the more valuable sheep. After this opening he was well away. Nothing could stop him talking sheep and goats. Nothing will ever stop a Karroo farmer from talking sheep and goats all the time. And if you can prevent him in the first place from talking sheep and goats, you are a better man than I am, Gunga Din. He needs no excuse, cue, or prompting. These Karroo farmers have been born amongst, reared with, and nourished on, sheep and goats. Such things as Gandhi, European wars, oriental earthquakes, or Chinese famines do not interest them—only sheep and goats. They use the words just as recurrently as I have used them above: they are the recurring decimal of the Karroo: "*Scapa 'n bok, scapa 'n bok,*" *ad infinitum*.

Our sheep- and goat-breeding guest went into most outspoken details of his breeding, mating, lambing, and rearing troubles. After all, when living year in and out alone with Nature, what subjects could be of deeper interest than the hatches, matches, and dispatches of all live things? One could safely have backed that old Boer's knowledge against many a trained vet. He was very weather-wise too, and we asked him to tell us when this long and terrible drought

would end in blessed rain. But when it came to long-distance prophecy he was, like all South Africans, too much of an optimist to be reliable. His prompt smile shining through his face moss and goatee beard, and his quick, "Very soon now, missus," seemed too good to be true or correct. The train steward had said something just like that months ago! And this Boer rubbed it in by saying I must visit his farm and meet his frau immediately, before the vleis and sluits became too flooded to cross!

I promised to go, and it was not long before I drove myself out one afternoon in Lizzie to the Cilliers' farm, some fifteen miles away. It was delightful to find the homestead, outside at any rate, so beautiful and like the best in the country. White curving gables rose gracefully above green-shuttered windows looking out on to a flagged stoep trellised with grape-vines. The stoep ran the whole front length of the house. What would this home be like inside?

At a table on the shady stoep a big lad of about twelve years was spending the afternoon trying, he said, to work out the cubic capacity of a new circular dam which "Pa" proposed building. But although his paper was a mass of scribbling and figures he seemed still far from any other answer to his problem than the famous lemon. Evidently he was devoutly hoping that if he continued long enough with his guesswork, and his paper and pencil lasted out, the solution would be vouchsafed unto him.

The lad's "Ma" came out and greeted me in useful, if stilted, English, which was much better than my Afrikaans would ever be, I felt. She said "*Ja*," her son Jan was a clever boy; he would get that sum done for his father just now. I suggested that πr^2 might help for a start. The good frau stared.

"Pie?" she said. "Oh! *Ja*! I always use lard for my pie pastry if I have it." I think I must have opened my mouth, and silently shut it again, like a fish taking in air.

"But let us go inside. Come," said Frau Cilliers cheerfully, and politely stood aside to let me precede her. Already she had overlooked my seeming irrelevance regarding sums and pies. In the doorway which led off the stoep into the dim interior of the house I found myself carefully stepping over a peculiar brown bundle on the mat.

"*Ach*! But you must not step over that; you must help *tramp* my washing," said the frau. She spoke this time in rapid Afrikaans, and since the taal was still little clearer than Arabic to me, I am afraid I stared this time. But when the good lady continued, "So," and demonstrated her meaning by marking time on the mysterious bundle, with her large flat feet encased in home-made veldschoen, I gathered I must do the same.

Obediently, I followed her lead, though it was evident that my sharp-heeled visiting shoes had not the same flattening effect as those of my hostess. We both marked time for a few moments on the brown bundle. She explained then that the heavy khaki drill clothes worn by the men-folk on South African farms were too unwieldy to iron in the usual way, especially when a large quantity for a big family has to be tackled, so each week, when the khaki clothes had been washed, they were all folded as desired, placed in a sheet kept for the purpose, wrapped in a sack, and dumped in a frequented doorway for everyone to walk over, until the garments were deemed sufficiently flat, and "ironed". It struck me then that perhaps some such custom as this was responsible for the fact that our wash-girl did not know how to iron trousers. She always placed the creases of poor James's flannels down the sides of the legs! She persisted in doing so in spite of weekly requests that the flannels should be pressed in the orthodox style.

After we had conscientiously tramped the washing my hostess led me up a long hall and unlocked a door on the right. This led into the best parlour, the holy of holies, opened only for visitors. I waited in the doorway while Frau

Cilliers pulled up the blinds; it would not do to knock over any furniture in this uncharted blackout. When daylight was admitted I saw that I need not have feared. A bulldozer could scarcely have downed the massive dining-table in the middle of the large room. It was a pity that table was so large, as it tended to overshadow the medallion of vermilion roses which decorated the centre of the pea-green carpet.

It was a wonderful carpet and a wonderful room. The woodwork was sky-blue, scarlet ball-fringed curtains draped the tall windows in heavy folds, and a fire of mis was laid in the mauve-tiled fireplace all ready for the cooler weather which might come if ever this stifling drought ended. On the blue mantelpiece a stuffed duck stood on one leg beneath a glass dome of the sort that covers immortelles in graveyards. Perhaps it was the first duck ever shot by the apple of her eye, my hostess' Jan, out there on the stoep. Above the duck was a little shelf on which stood two empty meat-paste jars. They were, one could but presume, used on occasions to burn incense to the memory of the heavily bearded patriarch in a massive gilt frame who hung on the wall directly above!

All four walls were adorned high up with ornate frames containing wonderful ancestors in magnificent beards, mutton chops, bustles and ringlets (according to sex). And all the frames were tilted forward, so that the ancestors could see down into the room. I got the uncanny feeling that this hedge of long-gone folk would love to break their picture-cords and descend on us at any moment. Some of them were vivid oleographs and others were obviously enlargements from photographs done by the type of firm who will do the baby free, provided an order is first given for three other enlargements.

For the rest of the room there was an atmosphere of horschair, wool mats, antimacassars, enamelled spittoons (some Boers are great chewers of tobacco), and vases which announced themselves in gold lettering to have been presents from Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, and elsewhere. Alas, the room was typical of the best parlour the world over. It came as a shock out on the veld. Even the huge mirrored sideboard was there, surmounted by a hymn text which aptly said, "We have enough, yet not too much to long for more." It was not until we were later leaving the room to look around the garden that I noticed a royalty hung above the door. He had climbed from last year's store almanack (large coloured engraving given free even to credit customers) on to the wall among the ancestors.

It was only later, after the ceremony of reception, that I was taken into the spacious, homely room where the family really lived. This was utterly charming and quite different from that horrible parlour. Its darkly-polished floor was like a pool on which floated variegated lilies—hand-made rugs in clear colours. There was a great wagon chest, black with age, chipped in places from much travelling and charred at one corner from fire. Was it a Kaffir fire torch thrown into a wagon laager that had charred it? That old chest looked as if it had seen some adventures. The chairs in this room were of stinkwood and teak, and were reimpje seated in home-cured leather strips, and they were adorned with gay patchwork cushions. And on a small sturdy table stood the family Bible, its beautiful brass clasp lovingly polished to gold.

It is not just an ornament in the home, this Bible. The Boer does not cram religion down anyone's gullet, but he could if he liked find an apt Bible quotation for almost any happening or incident in life. He knows his Bible pretty well by heart from beginning to end. In the days of the Transvaal Republic the members of the Volkstaad at Pretoria quoted the Bible freely, not only in saying "I told you so" after events, but in settling their future policy! The practical, far-seeing President Pretorius embellished his speeches with numerous Bible quotations, and shrewd old Paul Kruger had the words of the Book for ever on his lips. And

whatever their faults may have been, these Bible-using politicians were no humbugs. They were genuine to the core.

Mrs. Cilliers and I chased each other round in conversational circles without ever quite catching up on each other. Our Afrikaans-cum-English was suffering from strain. I was asked if I had bottled many peaches this season.

Bottle peaches? I said I had always bought them in tins.

Ach! Truly, no. One bottled them at home.

Did I make bobotie?

Whatever was that? I began to feel ignorant and small, and just a bit nettled in consequence, so that I felt tempted to say flippantly, "Do your ducks lay logarithms?"

Did I grow pumpkins, did I crochet, did I make water-melon komfyt, how many children had I? Just one!

"Vraatig! I have reared six and buried four," Mrs. Cilliers said with pride.

Apparently I had not started to live yet.

But come. The visitor must be shown everything.

Mrs. Cilliers led me first into her store-room. What a revelation that place was! There were rows and rows of bottled fruits of a dozen varieties—peaches, apricots, plums, quince, orange slices, etc., rows of bottled chicken and mutton, jars galore of pickles and chutnies, and preserved vegetables. And everything was home produced and home canned. There were also cases of home-made soaps (toilet and washing), dozens of jars of jams, crocks of rusks, cases of biltong, and other storable articles of every conceivable kind.

Their owner was childishly delighted and amused at my amazed and unstinted praise. Truly, I must take home and sample some of her efforts—if I would be so good as to return the bottles and jars some day. There was no hurry, of course, but these things were precious when one catered for a household of eight. She set out a generous assortment of good things to pack into Lizzie, in spite of my protests. She insisted.

When we went out to inspect the garden and orchard, Frau Cilliers put on a kappje, an old-fashioned sun-bonnet which so many Boer women wear, and I hope will always continue to wear, because it is so charming. The saxe blue of the cotton kappje gave to her white hair a pure, moonlit quality, and made her eyes look very blue. It seemed to enhance, too, the clearness of an apple-blossom skin. The Boer women of the veld like to take care of their complexions. Not one of them has ever been bitten with the ambition to let it become tanned and leathery, as some Englishwomen do. However capable she is, and she is always very capable indeed, the Boer woman is essentially feminine. I believe she always was so, even in the days when she had to live tough, ride hard, and shoot straight as a man in defence of the laager or the attacked homestead.

It is sometimes unkindly said that the Boer woman's sole preoccupations are "Kaffirs, kids, and kawfee". It is just another slick wisecrack, alliterative at all costs, even of truth. But wait. This *bon mot* can be challenged in detail.

The Boer woman always manages to get natives to help in her household even while other people sometimes do their own chores. And she can keep her servants, even though she will get the utmost of work out of them. She can handle Kaffirs, and make them like her handling.

Kids? She likes children, and nearly always has a large family. She rears them to be fine hefty men and well-built young women, and in doing it she keeps her own youth and spirits and a smooth brow. It was a Boer farmer's wife, a busy person with a family of nine, who gave me the best advice I've ever had about how to bring up children successfully. She said, "Never, never refuse a child's offer of help, however hindering you may find it when you are busy. To accept it gratefully and sincerely will be well worth while in the long run." In fact, never say in

effect, however kindly, "Run away and play; Mummy's too busy to let you help now." When a child has heard insulting words like those two or three times he will stop offering help to anyone—for ever. Worse, his mother will have ironed a wrong kink into his character, and given him the helpless feeling, however subconscious it may be, that he is of no use to those he loves.

The average Boer mother, I have so often noticed, lets her children do as much as possible for themselves, and for her, right from infancy; also she never worries unduly about them when they are out of her sight. The result is lovable, self-reliant children, utterly opposite to the smother-loved little horrors one so often comes across in Britain.

To get back to our alliterative tag—there is "kawfee" left to speak of. Yes, the Boers prefer it to tea. They will never fail hospitably to offer you breakfast-cups, or even bowls, of it at any time of the day or night. If the wisecracker must have that in his smart phrase, there is no harm done.

"Kawfee" once gave one Boer a good laugh at my expense, anyway. James and I had thrown a small supper-party, and had trotted out our little-used, miniature coffee-cups. Just as we were sipping out of them footsteps in veld-schoen were heard padding up the stoep steps, and then a figure in khaki drill and a broad-brimmed felt hat loomed up in the gloaming. He was riding home to his farm from the dorp. We asked if he would like some supper.

"*Danke*" (which means "No, thank you), "I have had supper," was the Boer's reply.

"But you'll join us for coffee?"

"*Ja, ja*, if you please." The man's face lit up at the idea of getting coffee after a hot ride.

I handed the stranger a coffee-cup. He accepted it in a manner plainly showing puzzlement. He held the little cup up to the light and scrutinized it. His eyes twinkled and laughed. Then he gulped the cup's contents in one mouthful. The tiny cup seemed to disappear in the depths of his bushy, tobacco-stained beard. Next he held the cup and saucer on high in the palm of his hand, gathered up our glances with his bright eyes, and burst out laughing. Why did we drink out of little girls' toy cups? he wanted to know! He was really thirsty after his ride; could he please have a real cup of "kawfee drink"?

Why had I been so thoughtless and dumb? "Dum" is the Afrikaans word for such lack of perspicacity as mine.

Out in the Cilliers' many-acred garden, I had to stop admiring things, for my hostess collared a garden-boy named Music (he had a voice like a corncrake) and bade him pick for me tomatoes, peaches, and other fruits, and vast melons, pumpkins and marrows, and a bit of everything that wonderfully stocked garden grew.

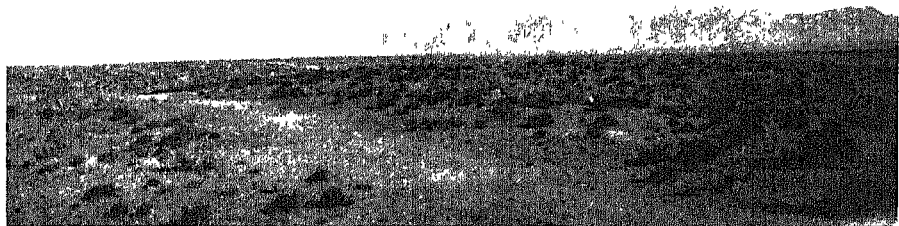
This garden showed that the sandy soil of the Karroo is fertile enough, given plenty of water and shade, for all plants. The shade is almost as important as the water, and it is making the beginnings of a garden in the heat of the Karroo which is so difficult. Trees should therefore be encouraged, both as shade and wind-breaks, before any but the hardiest of small plants are attempted. But this shady garden of the Cilliers was of some hundred years' standing; hence the profusion of flowers and vegetables growing amongst the coolness of spreading trees.

As we walked round, four of the unburied offspring clung to us as steel chips to a magnet: they peeked shyly at me round the fruit trees at first, and then, gaining confidence, emerged one by one to walk with us. Jan remained on the stoep, presumably.

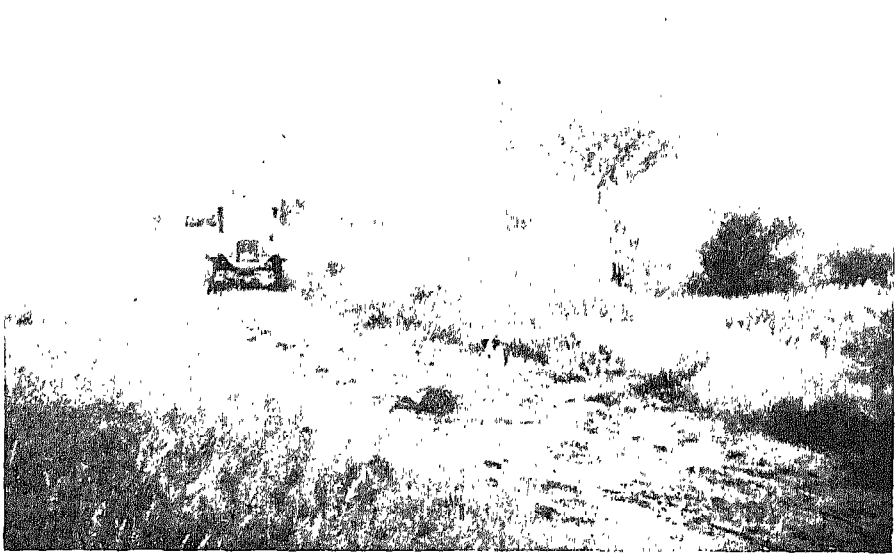
But Mrs. Cilliers had said she possessed six children. I asked about the sixth. Mrs. Cilliers' eyes lit with pride. She told me then of her lovely Sannie, with her



A stretch of the Great Fish River near Mariental. A dam supplies the doirp with water, but the river flows only in the wet season, being a 'sand river' for the rest of the year.



Approaching Goodhouse, near the Orange River. Wide treeless plains of hard ground peppered with small bush are typical of Namaqualand.



Parklike country. The tree is an umbrella tree, and the grasses, in appearance like plains of hay, make fine grazing, especially when in seed. This track is an exceptionally good "road"!



The end of a gemsbok shoot. This animal is preserved, and a licence is required to shoot one. The meat is good eating, and the hide makes stout reims.

two long plaits of golden hair, peach complexion, and the bluest, merriest eyes. (Did this description call for a pinch of salt?) Sannie was away at High School at the Cape, for she was much too clever merely to be educated at a farm school. She was going to be a teacher. I could not help thinking that if this girl were really as beautiful and wonderful as her fond mother took her to be, life would have much more in store for Sannie than school-teaching. There would be love, romance, thrills, marriage. On the other hand, when a simple child of the veld, born of these charming but unpretentious folk, was sent to see, learn, and appreciate the glamour of the big world of civilization, might it perhaps not end in discontent, unhappiness, and life-long regrets? But perhaps Sannie would return home unspoiled.

When we returned to the house we had coffee. The South African Dutch dearly love their "kawfee" drink. You can generally tell the nationality and political leanings of a South African household by the beverage offered at 4 p.m. Our "kawfee" this afternoon, served as usual in prodigious quantities in breakfast-cups, was already milked and generously sugared for us. Most people have a sweet tooth in South Africa. After all, sugar-cane grows plentifully in Natal. They also love starchy foods such as rice, potatoes, mealies, and bread, and so a great many women, like my hostess of today, are afflicted to some degree with avoirdupois. I don't know how the men escape it; perhaps their activities out of doors and on the veld save their figures. In the past days of little transport these foods were probably much easier to procure and store on the outlying farms in dry districts than fresh fruit and vegetables, or perishable foods, so that the eating of too much carbohydrates became a habit, and then an acquired taste never since shaken off.

Shortly after five o'clock I took my leave. Jan was actually still on the stoep, still guessing at his dam sum, when we came out of the front door (not forgetting to tramp the washing). I put Jan out of his misery by working out the measurements he wanted. If his mother thought me a useless encumberer of the earth because I could not make soap, bottled fruit, bobotie, or babies, Jan at any rate obviously considered me a conjurer.

The good frau and I parted on most excellent and cordial terms. But as I drove away with the back of Lizzie piled high with her generous gifts from larder, orchard, and garden, I wondered about this new friendship. The good frau was lovable, capable, and intelligent. Well, I hoped I was the same. Yet we were such entirely different beings in everything. Could we ever become real friends? Would we not always be a little inclined to criticize each other, even if we did it in the most good-natured way? Our respective upbringing, our whole outlook on life, were so different. Perhaps Sannie would prove to be our missing link—and also I really must learn some more Afrikaans. There are so many gaps in the social intercourse between people of different nations, and so many bridges to build across the gaps. But for the sake of the peace and friendship throughout the world we must all build those bridges.

Perhaps my interests, owing to circumstances over which I had no control, had always been too wide and varied, leaving me a dabbler in all trades and skilled in none. If Frau Cilliers' circumstances had confined her to "Kaffirs, kids, and kawfee", she was at least an authority and an enviable expert on these three important subjects. It has always been a moot question whether it is better to know a lot about a few things or a little about a lot of things.

Our next visitor was a true son of the Karroo, but indicated it in a manner other than talking sheep and goats. His local patriotism was superb. He came

one scorching hot morning, just in time for elevenses, in a covered wagon full of little starving lambs. He was trying to sell them at any price, because their mothers were dying from drought on his devastated farm and he could not rear them. We could not do with these lambs either, but I bought one little creature as a pet. It was a weakly mite, and in spite of zealous bottle-feeding it died in a few days. You would have thought this Boer would have been hating the cruel, parched Karroo. I, feeling harrowed by the sight of his load of pathetic babies, and jaded by the heat, sighed for a breath of sea air.

"Ah, but, missus," said the Boer, "the veld is much better than the sea!"

"But the sea is glorious," I replied, truly if tritely.

"Ja, missus, the sea is glorious," he repeated a bit doubtfully, "but look at our vleis, and kopjes, and all those bushes which cover the veld. Truly the veld is more wonderful than the sea." He dogmatically clung to his assertion, and waved a sun-tanned, hairy hand to indicate the shimmering karroo in the glare outside.

"When were you last at the coast?" James asked conversationally, in order, most probably, to stop a futile argument from going any further.

"Eh? The coast?" Our visitor laughed at the suggestion. "I've never been to the coast in my life!" he boomed, and laughed gustily at the idea of taking a holiday from his beloved veld. I recalled the words:

Ye think the rustic cackle of your bourg
The murmur of the world

Have you not met gaffers in any English village like that Boer? There are many of such mentality throughout Britain. Yet the love of such people for their own little corner is really a great asset to our Empire. "For ever England!" or "For ever Karrool!"—or wherever it may be, linked up by a love and feeling mutually understood across thousands of miles. Yet, paradoxically, this very patriotism can be dangerous: it is isolationism thinly disguised. So some interchange between the veld and the seaside is not only healthy, but essential for the peace and goodwill of all throughout the world. The peoples of the back blocks must be brought to know those of the sea, and all beyond the seas. It is so easy nowadays to travel vicariously with the help of books, plays, the cinema, and the wireless, as well as in fact, that there is little excuse for the people of any country, or part of any country, to remain insular, or even peninsular, cut off in narrow stupid super-patriotism from those around or beyond them.

I have mentioned the mis stacked in the fireplace of the Cillier home, but the commodity needs further description. The stuff is really reminiscent of the peat of old Ireland, and comes into being in a very simple manner. Owing to the jackals which roam the veld each night in search of mutton for their dinner, the sheep of all South African farms, unless enclosed in wire netting encampments (which is the modern, and ideal method) are kraaled or penned into enclosures, occasionally constructed of stone walls, but more often of mis cakes piled flat on top of each other to make a rampart some three feet thick and about four or five feet high. After several years the ground in the kraal consists of sheep-droppings, trampled by the animals' hooves into a hard crust some eighteen inches or two feet deep. With a sharp spade the top six or eight inches of this crust is sliced off into cakes about two feet square, levered free and laid out in the sun to dry thoroughly. When dried, the new slabs of mis are added to the already existing walls of mis cakes which form the kraal walls. Then when the missus in her kitchen wants fuel for the stove, she goes over to a kraal, carries back a slab or two of mis, and proceeds to bash it into small bits suitable for insertion in the range

or grate by banging it on a stone or doorstep. Sheep-droppings are a very useful by-product of the South African farm: it gives the material for smearing floors, it provides fuel, and is a first-class manure for the lands and garden.

If the mis is of pure droppings it makes an excellent fuel, but sometimes the kraal has not been occupied long enough before being dug, so that the cakes are half earth. In this case the result of burning them is very smoky and far from satisfactory. Surely a book could be written about the national fuels of this world. When far from home, the sight of a leaping log fire must fill the breast of a lumberman with nostalgic longing, just as the exiled South African must sometimes yearn for the pungent scent of a mis fire.

Merino sheep penned in mis kraals yield very soiled wool, as can readily be understood, so that the old method of penning them in this way is dying out now, and the modern farmer of the Karroo is spending more and more money on wire netting encampments.

Indeed, jackal-proofing, as it is called, is now compulsory by law. This means that as soon as your neighbour has fenced in the outer boundaries of his farm, you are bound to stand half the cost of the fencing you share in common. Having been forced in this way to fence one side of your farm, you naturally think, "I may as well do the other three sides really to benefit from this expense." Thus you in your turn force your other three neighbours to begin fencing—that is, presuming a square farm, of course. If your place is hexagonal, you will force five other farmers to follow your example. And so the chain goes on linking mile upon mile of wire netting criss-cross all over the country. Do not imagine it as unsightly. Fences, in those vast distances, are utterly insignificant, and in their greyness fade out of sight into the drabs of brown and fawn and dull green of the veld. There is none of the patchwork-quilt effect of an English countryside of small fields. These encampments each enclose many hundreds of acres of grazing.

This compulsory fencing is one of the unexpected heavy expenses which may confront the new settler who has decided on stock farming. But the Government hands out loans for fencing at a low rate of interest, so the matter is not so alarming after all. The saving from losses in stock to the jackal, and in higher returns for cleaner wool, very soon compensate.

While jackal-proofing is ridding the farmers of the night prowlers which used to play such havoc amongst their flocks, it has come to be much cursed by the motoring community. Many roads in South Africa pass across the farms, so that when farmers carry their fences right across the roadways, it follows that motorists must stop to open and shut a gate at every boundary they cross, not to mention the intersections of camps within the farms.

Like ancient Greece, South Africa is making history nowadays, but like that old nation she is also busy manufacturing one or two myths. In a few districts like the Karroo, at all events, the joy of the open road is one of them! For what joy can there be for the motorist who must descend from his chariot fifteen times in thirty miles? A fortune awaits the man who can train motor-cars to jump! He will have to do it by kindness, of course, or he will have the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Machinery landing on his neck. The country is full of well-meaning societies of all sorts, and there may well be such a body functioning in the land.

The gate problem would not be so bad if South African gates were as other earthly gates, and not so confoundedly like the gates of Paradise, which are reputedly hard to pass through. Every farmer is a firm believer in home-made gates constructed from the iron of the scrap-heaps on his place, mated generally with barbed wire. So I've come to doubt the golden gates of Heaven theory since living in South Africa, and quite believe Saint Peter must stand guard over a

contraption of wire and poles, with wooden gate-posts so old that they have rooted and are again sprouting as trees!

Incidentally one cannot help wondering if Saint Peter plugs his ears with anti-blast rubbers when a South African motorist draws up at the Final Barrier. I once met a man who had the weird hobby of making a list of novel expletives, and he fell on my neck when I gave him the idea of camping beside a farm gate for a couple of days. His collection would be complete in no time! At one gate with spring hinges which jumped back and hit us one dark and stormy night I learnt a new word from James, and I did think I knew his entire repertoire. The gate which inspired this addition to my King's English was another Saint Peter's gate, though goodness knows no Heaven lay beyond; merely Karroo veld and more wire entanglements. If the stockbreeder must make his gates vermin-proof, he surely need not make them motorist-proof—though the two are probably synonymous in his mind.

Once a long bout of gate-opening resulted in a nightmare. I dreamt that after I had died, first St. Peter, and then the Devil, refused me admission to their respective domains, and I perforce had to go back to motoring in South Africa, where Government had, in the meantime, made gate-planting compulsory at every hundred yards. In my dream I acquired a raging headache, and so changed my family motto from the cheery little phrase it was into "Sine aspirin nil faciendum" and registered it at Somerset House as my good resolution for the year.

We have recently improved on the old riddle, "When is a door not a door?" by asking, "When is a gate not a gate?" The answer is, "When it's a farm hek." To the uninitiated, it must be explained that this is when the alleged gate is home-made from a discarded spring mattress, field harrow, or rose pergola, mounted on home-made hinges and set across a road to annoy motorists. Or possibly the hek may be a thing of beauty achieved by combining the last of the baby's cot, the remains of Aunt Agatha's bath-chair, and ten yards of chicken-wire handed over by the Leghorns who passed a resolution not to pay for their keep.

South African gates make you want to put straws in your hair. One grows flippant or furious over them according to whether one is sitting at home considering them or trying to negotiate them in a car. If only the things were uniform! But, being home-made, each is different from every other gate. Some hinge on the left, others on the right, and one wrestles alternately with wire and poles, railway sleepers and baling wire, corrugated iron and oil casing. One gate we saw boasted brass knobs, and we strongly suspected it of being an ex-bedstead! These gates are all guaranteed to shred any temper into tatters.

There are some people who drive cars which are not their own (perhaps belonging to their firm), who charge the gates rather than get out to open and shut them, thus damaging both gate and car. More often, though, they open the gate to spare the car, but do not trouble to get down again after having driven through to shut it. This often results in heavy stock losses to the farmer concerned. Great is the war, then, between motorists and fenced-in farm-owners. While sympathizing with the exasperation of the long-distance motorist in a hurry, who has to stop time and again just as his speedometer is mounting, more sympathy is deserved by the landowner who has spent hundreds, sometimes thousands, of pounds in fencing, when carelessness, or laziness by motorists, results in financial loss. Some farmers fence along each side of the roads and avoid all trouble, but in a country of huge farms it is only a minority who can afford to do this. Fencing costs on an average about £25 per mile to put up, and after that comes the cost of upkeep.

From these gates has arisen at least one funny story current throughout South Africa. As with the story of the Indian rope trick, everyone in the country has met someone who knew the man to whom the incident happened. It relates

that a motorist with a very pretty girl in the seat beside him drew up at a particularly intricate gate. His wife, who had been sitting alone in the back of the car, climbed down to open the gate, for gate-opening is a privilege generally accorded to wives. Still chatting gaily to his enchanting companion, the motorist drove through the gate—and quite forgot to stop again. Driving with one hand, he rapidly vanished in a cloud of dust, leaving his spouse still closing the gate far to the rear on a lonely road. Presumably the outraged lady reached home somehow and somewhere.

Some people carry a boy with them for the sole purpose of opening gates. Sometimes you will find a native piccanin at a gate, waiting and hoping to make a little pin-money. The thankful driver of a car is only too willing to throw him a penny, or even a ticky, for his Open Sesame act. Cruising through a gate-studded district can be quite expensive if piccanins too are plentiful!

Yes, I often wonder just how Saint Peter copes with the practised gate-openers of the karroo and other parts of South Africa, when, no doubt feeling small, they finally draw up to the Last Barrier of all. What arts and wiles do the late unworthy motorists employ to get by? Has Saint Peter ever seen the South African commercial traveller try his gate-crashing stunt? Has he ever been flipped a penny? Has he ever heard the things the motorist says when a gate will not open unto him? If so the Saint is impervious to all further shock.

A well-frequented road ran through our rented farm, and since it passed within fifty yards of the house we had many opportunities of studying the great trek wagons that creaked and rumbled past so often. In these large, tented wagons the trek Boers and their families live, move, and have their being. They live by moving, always moving onwards. Some of these nomadic Boers are financially comfortable men, yet they never own or rent a farm. They spend their entire lives travelling, grazing their flocks and herds by the roadside as they go along. The party covers about twelve miles a day, and then outspans each night by a water-hole, or on the property of some amiable farmer who can be persuaded to give or sell water for the wanderer's stock and personal needs.

The womenfolk of the trek do all their cooking, washing, and domestic chores in the open at these evening outspans, and spend the rest of their lives dozing away the days on a big feather mattress in the wagon, as the vehicle trundles on and on along the baked roads. Many of these people have never slept under a roof in their lives. They are born in a trek wagon, live their uneventful lives through, and at last die in a trek wagon. They are the "gypsies" of South Africa. Living a Spartan life, they are a hardy lot. Their chief foods are mealie-meal porridge, goat-flesh and goat's milk, wholemeal bread, and sometimes the luxury of rice. Coffee is, of course, their drink.

The mealie pap is made in a black three-legged pot on a tripod over an open fire. It is a custom to make the pap very thick and stiff, so that when it is cold it can be cut into chunks and fried up for the next meal. No real Boer, either trekker or homesteader, considers a meal complete unless it includes mealie pap. An old Boer with money to burn went to Johannesburg for the first time, and put up at a good hotel. The first night at dinner he ploughed stolidly through an eight-course meal and all its accompaniments, then turned to the waiter and said, "And now may I have the mealie pap!"

The trek Boer is not partial to fruit and vegetables. Unable to grow them while always travelling, he is averse to wasting money, as he thinks, on buying them. The only things he appreciates in this line, especially if obtained free, are pumpkins and melons, either water-melons or the sweet melons known as span-spek. Indeed, you might call this the national vegetable and fruit of South Africa,

just as mealie pap is the national dish. The Boers are rather conservative about the few vegetables they eat, and the manner of preparing them. We actually met one old woman who did not know that tomatoes could be eaten raw; she always cooked them as her mother had done before her. Some vegetables which can be grown splendidly here are quite unknown. We once experimented with a crop of egg plant, or aubergine, and took them into the dorp for sale. Our storekeeper said, "But what are they, missus?" Everyone said the same! Only a few consented to try this new vegetable, when given them free. Aubergine was not a profitable crop! So we went back to growing pumpkins.

The trek Boer is dying out today. The law still holds good that a trekker may graze his stock to fifty yards each side of any road he travels—and a very elastic fifty yards he makes of it—but more and more farms are being fenced in now, and the trekker consequently has less and less freedom. However, he still exists, even in the Karroo, and in greater numbers in the wide, unfenced districts of Bechuanaland, Namaqualand, and South-West Africa.

Undoubtedly the trekker is often a great nuisance to the homesteader, chiefly because these nomads are the means of carrying both animal and human diseases, such as anthrax, from farm to farm. That dreadful skin disease known as scab was almost unknown in South-West Africa until the great drought in the Union in 1927. Then dozens of trek Boers went up to that district, with the result that the farmers there had one outbreak after another of the fell disease among their stock.

The trek Boer is not always a very grateful or considerate soul. You give him leave to outspan and camp near your dam for the night, and he departs next morning leaving his hallmark in the form of smouldering ashes, scattered tins, paper, and rubbish. Also he may mutter furiously when you suggest charging him the recognized watering fee for his stock. Having had free grazing along your roads, he takes free water for granted. And the women of every trek that passes climb on to your stoep and ask for just a little bread, just a little coffee, sugar, this, that, or the other. At first I was soft-hearted. I felt sorry for the poor people with only a wagon to live in! It was later I became enlightened to the fact that these "poor people" were often much richer than we were, and that they could afford to rent or buy a farm, but preferred their age-long habit of trekking.

The trek Boer is the most acquisitive of all people. "God helps those who help themselves," literally read, is his motto. He loves to get something for nothing. If you should carelessly leave a sheet of galvanized iron, a petrol tin, a coil of wire, a rope, reins, an enamel jug, or anything useful out of sight while a trek is passing, you may be sure that article will pass with it. When we see emerging through a cloud of dust down the road a long team of donkeys pulling a big "ship of the veld", draped with fowl crates, furniture and lolling women, and accompanied by a flock of sheep, we gather up our valuables and make up our minds to be firm about the water charges. (Though it is fun to give sweets and koekies to the sturdy, khaki-clad children of the party, who are generally likeable little souls.)

One trek Boer led me a fine dance one morning when James was out and I had to deal with the trek alone. The man asked my permission to water twelve hundred sheep and goats.

"Yes," I said, "and the charge will be six shillings."

He pretended to be amazed.

"But, missus, I am a poor man; I have no money at all—not even a ticky." So, since in the absence of cash payment in kind is quite customary, I said I would accept a nanny goat. Then he protested that a goat was worth ten shillings. Since the creature could not be split up we were at a dead end until I looked up the latest market report in a farming journal, and was able to show my Boer friend

that goats were averaging just six shillings. So the goat was brought to me, and since there seemed to be no rope or reim handy with which to tether the creature, we persuaded it into an empty pontok. The door was rather dilapidated, but I propped it up and rushed back to the kitchen to rescue a batch of bread from the oven, while the trek went on its way down the road. Five minutes later I noticed that the pontok door was down, and a determined goat was tearing along the sun-smitten road to catch up with its late companions. Not to be beaten, I downed my loaves and ran, hatless, into the glare to chase the goat. The trekkers saw the joke, and we all joined in a grand goat-hunt, with many a tally-ho, yoicks, and all that! When the animal was caught again the trek Boer kindly offered to lead it home for me. This time we found a rope, and made the goat really fast. Then, still panting hard, I once more wished the heartily amused trekker good-bye. But he was not listening, he was gazing down the hill at the pumpkins in our garden. He dived a gnarled, tanned hand into the pocket of his well-patched khaki slacks and pulled out a coin. He offered a shilling and said, "Missus, I want to buy a pumpkin for my frau and kinder."

"So," I said in my sternest Afrikaans, "you are a poor man with no money at all—not even a ticky!" The man's deep-set eyes met mine and twinkled under their bushy brows. His tobacco-stained teeth appeared through his heavy moustache in a wide smile.

"Ja, missus," he chuckled.

I should have taken his shilling, but I confess I gave him a pumpkin. We had lots of them; he had none. It is better to grow happy than rich, and he and his had given me good value in a morning's fun with the goat.

Though Boer food is rather greasily cooked, there are many dishes which are very toothsome. For instance, since milk is difficult to keep during the hot days and nights of summer, "thick milk" for breakfast sometimes takes the place of the ubiquitous mealie pap. This is simply unboiled cow's milk turned sour and solid in an open glass dish, overnight, and then eaten like junket with the addition of plenty of fresh cream and sugar. It is delicious, and very digestible and wholesome. A constant supply is obtained by merely adding a tablespoonful of the previous morning's thick milk to the new milk. This also makes a very refreshing drink when shaken up in a calabash, and chilled by wrapping a piece of damp flannel or sacking around the gourd and standing it in a breeze.

A favourite dish is made with sheep's liver. The meat is minced, seasoned, and mixed with chopped onion and mixed herbs, (or sometimes just mint). It is then shaped into a sausage and rolled up in the lace-like stomach fat of a sheep. The fat is skewered into place, and the whole roll baked in the oven. It is very rich if eaten hot, but cuts into neat and flavoursome slices when cold. As a hot dish it is better served with some sweet fruit sauce, such as apple sauce, which would help to digest the fat.

The newly-settled housewife from overseas would be wise to try and get some cookery lessons from a Boer hausfrau in the dishes of the country. Most of these dishes are easy to make, the ingredients are the most easily obtained, and such foods are really delicious. In addition to Boer savoury dishes to break the monotony of your everyday joints, you will learn of many komfyts and preserves made from watermelon rinds, sieved guavas, tomatoes, and other fruits and vegetables.

In the coaching days of South Africa, wayside eating-houses served a favourite dish known as sasatie and rice, which is still popular today in Boer homes. Little pieces of mutton alternated with fat are strung on skewers and soaked for quite twenty-four hours in a gravy made of pulped apricots, a few orange leaves, sugar, salt, and onion and garlic fried in dripping. Curry powder and a dash of cayenne are mixed with vinegar and water and added, and the whole boiled up together

for a few minutes. The skewers of meat can be prepared meanwhile. When the sauce is cooled—and it should be really cool—the meat, on its skewers, is put in to steep. The next day, when required, the skewers of sasaties are laid on a gridiron and grilled, while the sauce is heated up and strained over the meat when served. It is a lovely, pungent dish.

Bobotie is another great dish. It is a mixture of cooked minced meat, stock, finely minced almonds, onions fried in butter, breadcrumbs, curry powder, lemon juice, seasoning and sugar, packed into a greased pie-dish and baked for about fifteen minutes. Then a custard of milk and eggs is poured over the top with a few orange leaves added as flavouring, and the whole baked again till the custard is set.

Were I to go on this book would turn into a cookery book. Suffice it to say that milk tart, mealie-meal cakes, fat koekies, Dutch versions of America's pumpkin pie, scrambled ostrich egg, variations of Cape snoek, Boston bread, and many other South African dishes are well worth learning and trying out.

CHAPTER V

THE TERRIBLE DROUGHT CONTINUED TO HOLD THE GREAT KARROO IN A TIGHT FIST. No rain had fallen for almost two years. It was January again, the rains were due, and everyone watched the sky anxiously. Day after day great flat-bottomed clouds sailed like barges across the blue of the sky, and daily dispersed without breaking. Rain, "the seven years' wonder of the Karroo", seemed to be passing us over yet again. Just why it is called that is hard to explain, for I am sure an unbroken drought of such long duration has never really occurred. A two-year drought seemed to be the absolute limit that life could bear, for all around ruin, death, and desolation threatened everyone.

In the meantime we had plenty of the stuff known jestingly as "South African rain"; this means sand-storms! Some, with characteristic optimism, argued these inflections to be a sure sign of coming rain, for although sand-storms are definitely not the infallible heralds of rain, the wet season is invariably preceded by the worst of sand-laden winds. So you can take the omen whichever way you conveniently please. In any case the howling, scurrying drifts of grit parch and scorch up the veld, blowing away the vegetation already turned to tinder by the sun, and you devoutly hope that rain may follow to revive the world again. Those devastating sand-storms came again and again that blazing summer, when the mercury soared to 110° and over, and our hearts sank to zero and under.

Although the veld was just now bare desert, the prices of land and the rents of farms in the district remained the same, and even rose, such was the demand for the smallest bit of bleached grazing. We paid £120 a year for our 3000 morgen (a morgen equals 2.1 acres approximately), and heard that we were likely to be asked £160 in the near future. Farms to be sold fetched 15/- or £1 a morgen. These figures may sound absurdly low to the newcomer from Europe, but he must remember that the hard-baked plains of the Karroo are semi-desert, and not to be thought of in the same category at all as the rich farmlands of England, Denmark, or other such agricultural countries, almost every square yard of which can be profitably used. When buying a farm in South Africa you must generally buy many acres of useless land along with the good portions of a farm. You pay the

same price for the numerous morgen of rocky outcrop included as for the good bush-growing or grass land. No allowance can be made by the seller for the many acres made barren and useless by erosion either.

You hear stories here of how in the past people bought lands and farms for no more than a bottle of whisky and a pair of boots; or perhaps a sack of grain and a bottle of gin. But in modern times there is only one way of getting for yourself a perfectly free farm. President Paul Kruger's long-ago promise still holds good: that a man who has twelve sons shall be granted a freehold farm for him and his seed for ever! The possession of daughters does not count, by the way. We heard there had been a claimant in recent years, but I am sure it was not an Englishman. It is the Boer and no other who sensibly has large families on the veld.

One day an elderly Boer came up to our homestead asking to see James. I told the man my husband was out at an outlying camp, and suggested that he should come inside and wait. But he was in a hurry, and asked if I could send a message to James. I explained that the shepherds and hands were all away out and busy, and that I was alone until dinner-time.

"Have you no sons?" asked the Boer.

"Just one." I indicated my small boy.

"Only one!" The Boer's eyebrows shot up under his terai. "I've got ten sons," he said.

I nearly wished him luck. He was well on the way to qualify for a free farm. I have often wondered if he ever got it. Perhaps he was the case of which we later read in the papers.

The erosion just mentioned is a serious menace to South Africa's farming future, and is one of the unexpected obstacles which the new settler may have to fight with money, hard work, and valuable time.

When the first torrential rains of the season fall—supposing the rains do break—on the iron-hard veld, baked solid by eight or nine months of unbroken sunshine, the storm waters rush over the resistant surface, following animal paths, or natural channels made by former rains. In a very short time the shallow channels deepen into gaping sluits, which carry all the precious rain to waste and cut up the veld into caked masses of useless acreage.

In the past, the greedy or go-as-you-please farmers took no notice of the havoc, and indulged in overstocking their farms, and other such catchpenny vices conducive to soil erosion. But recently the farming community has begun to wake up to the folly of its past ways, and a considerable fight is being put up all the time to prevent erosion and to reclaim land previously lost.

When buying a farm the new settler must therefore see to it that he will not have to spend too much capital in righting the carelessness and apathy of his predecessors in this matter. The tourist "tracts" may describe this chopped-up veld as a specimen of "rugged grandeur", but the prospective farmer must look at it from a point of view other than the purely scenic one. A brimming river may be an "impressive sight" in the short-lived rainy season, but if it flows through the farm he intends buying he would be wise to ask how much water—or how little—that river will contain in the summer which follows, when his thirsty flocks and herds clamber down the banks in search of a drink. "The magnificence" of the mountains—those flat-topped, treeless ranges with their bare precipices—should be ignored in favour of questions as to their effect on the local rainfall. Also, apparently lovely veld starred with flowers may prove a ruinous investment to the tyro in stock farming, for a proportion of South Africa's prettiest plants are highly poisonous. When, for instance, vermeersickte springs up after rain, the

tenderfoot may think, "Ah! Here at last is green food for my sheep." If, in his ignorance, he sends his animals out to graze this yellow-daisied ground plant, many of them will come home dead, as the Irishman said. So even the scenery offers a few pitfalls to the new arrival.

By this time we had begun to know a few of these snares, and were appalled at the quantities of formerly usable land laid waste on Karroo farms through past carelessness, by erosion. But nowadays the Government Department of Agriculture issues pamphlets on ways and means of checking erosion, advice on the building of earthworks, and instructions for the catching and storing of flood waters. So although Karroo folk have acquired, through the generations, the habit of grouching about their droughts, thanks largely to their later wisdom and work they now have considerably less cause for the habitual grouse. Irrigation, and properly conserved grazing, now carry them through many dry times, when before they might have despaired and failed to pull through. It has been realized that too much was being taken from the veld, and that the time has come to put something back.

But the desperate importance of rain, even the drop of water which Dives craved, was driven home to James and me that season, and made most painfully clear to us. Even Gladstone's supernatural powers of smelling out grazing seemed to have given out completely. After all, the grazing no longer existed, and our newly acquired sheep began to fade out daily by the dozen. All over the district, on every farm, sheep died in hundreds from poverty, lambs' throats were being cut in dozens because these babies could not be reared, ruin seemed inevitable for all, right through the pitiless vast Karroo.

But such is the South African spirit in the face of adversity that we gathered together one night for a let-us-try-and-cheer-up dance which was held in the big dining-room of the dorp's chief hotel.

The weather all through that day had been blistering, and unbearably oppressive. A thick steaminess had weighted the atmosphere from the bulbous clouds which had visited us daily, but refused to break. A raging sand-storm had come shrieking over the plains that morning and driven the clouds away yet again. Clouds signify so little here; no one counts on rain until they know it is actually on the ground.

But at 8.30 that blessed night those clouds at last changed their minds about remaining for ever in the heavens, and decided to burst. With an amazing suddenness the rain came down as if the bottom had been knocked out of a water-tank, just as everybody was arriving for our dance. "Everybody" consisted of the entire farming population of the district, plus the dorp people, solicitor, doctor, store-keepers, artisans, railway people, all more or less dependent for their livelihood on the prosperity of the farmers, as is the case throughout rural South Africa.

"Oh," exclaimed a friend, "what a pity! This rain will just damp everyone's spirits and spoil the whole dance." She was a lady out on a first visit from England, and knew even less about this country and its inhabitants than we did at that stage.

How mistaken she was! She did not realize that now the rain had come to revive the veld, sheep would fatten and increase, and that therefore the farmers would once more make money from clean, rain-washed wool, fat mutton, and the crops off their gardens and lands (kept alive by irrigation till now); and that consequently the doctor and attorney would get their bills paid (even if they had to take the value in sheep instead of cash, as is often the case), that the store-keepers would collect long-outstanding debts, and the artisans find employment once more.

As the sitting-out places in the hotel garden turned to lakes, and even the stoeps were invaded by the downpour, the entire dorp and district flocked into the

dance-hall. And surprisingly—to the mind of the visitor from England—everyone was beaming and chattering, laughing and jesting hilariously, almost hysterically. The “ticky draai” band struck up a tune with great gusto. A squeeze-box, a mouth-organ, a violin, an ancient piano and a comb-and-tissue-paper competed fortissimo to break our ear-drums. Some couples took the floor, singing as they danced, as South Africans love to do. In less than a minute everyone was singing, and everyone was trying to gyrate. But the hall had become packed tight as a wool bale, so that presently no one could move, let alone turn round in any attempt to dance. We all stood ecstatically swaying and shuffling, breast to breast, jammed together, and sang. Lord! How we sang! Hundreds of us praising Heaven to the tune and words of *Coal Black Mammy of Mine* for the life-saving rain. No crowd of Hindus ever lauded Indra as heartily as we praised the Rain God that evening. Before it was finished there were women, who had for months past been facing ruin with their husbands, smiling and singing with the tears running freely down their pale cheeks, young men were kissing each other’s sisters with impunity, and more than one old bearded opa mopped his keen, veld-trained eyes unashamedly with a big bandana.

The whole evening went with the craziest swing and gaiety. Never mind the discomfort! Everyone forgave his worst enemy in the bar, new business deals and bargains were being struck all round in that “stock exchange”, and not a woman there cared at all if she were not the best-dressed person at the show. All minds ran along a single track that night, as the rain continued to pour and pour. It had rained; the drought was over. That was all that mattered, or ever would matter—until next time.

Half-way through the evening I found myself seated between dances among the chaperons who, limpet-like, lined the walls of the dance-hall, after that first wild prance in which everybody had joined. My right-hand neighbour proved to be Frau Cilliers, and beyond her sat a demure-looking girl who wore, however, a smart powder-blue semi-evening frock, obviously not cut by a veld dressmaker. A neat, well-set permanent wave enhanced the girl’s shapely gold head. Her hair was like a shining halo above a serious face of lovely pink and cream. Frau Cilliers introduced the girl to me as her Sannie.

So this was Sannie! When she spoke the serious features relaxed into a frank and friendly smile, and eyes of a very clear blue, like her father’s, looked directly into mine, while she gave a formal little bow of her regal head, and refrained from offering the usual Boer handshake. But if a Cape Town education had given Sannie conventional mannerisms and clothes, it cannot have altered Boer features and build of body. According to popular ideas, Sannie should have been heavy and slightly bovine. But the usual conception of the “typical” Boer is so often proved quite wrong because people are so apt to forget the innumerable throw-backs there are to the ancestors of fine Flemish origin, or the aristocratic and cultured French lineage who were migrants to South Africa long ago. I do not suppose even Pa and Ma Cilliers knew who was the four times great-grandfather of their lovely Sannie; they probably took ingenuous credit themselves for their daughter’s great good looks.

Sannie and I had both heard about each other, and since that always suggests a furtherance of friendship, we asked each other to tea. I gave in to Sannie’s pressing invitation, deciding to be guest first and hostess later, since I knew the drawbacks of entertaining in our hired shack!

It was destined to be a “hullo” and “good-bye” visit, the beginning and end of a short acquaintanceship, but not yet the start of the long friendship which came later. For we were about to leave our rented home and travel afar very soon.

Once more I was received in the visitors’ parlour and given “kawfee” drink, but

this time there was still more to be seen than the oasis-like garden, the full store-rooms and larders, the children, the black farm-hands, the ducks, hens, sheep and cows.

"Would you like to see Sannie's needlework?" Frau Cilliers asked after coffee. Sannie half demurred, but out of politeness, and after pressure from her mother, she presently led the way along a stone-flagged stoep to her bedroom. Standing for a moment just inside the open door of the room, with her shapely head slightly on one side in a questioning way, Sannie's blue eyes ran quickly round the place and then met mine as if asking opinion and approval of her very own domain.

Against whitewashed walls and black polished flooring there stood out an old four-poster bed. High windows were hung with long curtains of chintz in cherry colour and green. Before one window stood a kidney-shaped dressing-table, frilled about with dainty spotted muslin. There were an inviting rocking-chair, a chintz-covered armchair, a blackwood press and an antique tallboy which glowed with the loveliness of age-long polishing. I felt sure it must have come from France with that several times great-grandfather that Sannie must have had at the time when the Huguenots were sailing away from persecution to a freer land than their beautiful France.

Sannie's needlework lived in the drawers of the old tallboy. Every drawer was filled with it: broderie Anglaise, Mountmellick work, crochet, knitting, wool embroidery, white embroidery and coloured, undergarments, bedspreads, guest towels—every conceivable "soft" a woman could want for herself and her home, as a linen-draper might say. I admired everything for its perfection of workmanship, but wondered too the reason for such masses of stuff. Many hours over many years must have gone to their creation. Some of the things were obviously of Frau Cilliers' suggestion and inspiration, the rest as obviously Sannie's. Sannie could not have thought of the antimacassars, and Ma could not have conceived the *crêpe-de-Chine* undies. But there they lay, piles of them, side by side. Was Sannie returned from the Cape already engaged to be married? My look must have asked the question as my eyes met Sannie's. Already we seemed to understand each other like that. A slow blush crept up from the girl's slim neck and coloured the pretty pink and white of her face to an unhappy red for a moment. Poor Sannie, she was at the cross-roads between the old traditions and the new. The old, assisted by Ma's prompting, had led her into preparing her entire trousseau according to Boer custom long ere a fiancé had been sighted, let alone become a fact, while the new pointed out to her the modern unconventionality of the proceeding.

Happily, young folk recover from loss of poise in a moment. The colour died out of Sannie's cheeks, and she smiled her gentle smile again as I assured her that I thought it all a most wise idea, saving as it does the usual last-minute scramble to furnish a clothes and linen chest, just when time ought to be spent in final explorations of the future husband's character and references!

"What a lovely home you will have presently," I said, and we both turned again to admiring all the lovely linen, quite sure now as to their rightness in the scheme of life for a girl. Everyone knows that every woman's one aim and intention is instinctively marriage. The English like to pretend it is otherwise, and against their hypocrisy the frankness of the Boer woman's attitude is positively refreshing. Besides, in the case of Sannie Cilliers it would have been a queer thing if some male had not had the sense to want her, and Sannie would have been worse than a fool not to know that she was very desirable. Why should either she or her mother pretend otherwise?

Although the Boer girl's modesty carries her only as far as making her personal and household linen, before being even engaged, one suspects with good reason that the potential grandmothers collect baby-clothes on the quiet while their daughters are still at school! For every Boer mother hopes to be a grand-

mother, and anyway it is Kismet in just about every family in the world, so why not prepare in good time?

I hoped to have Sannie over to see me before we left our temporary farm, but our going earlier than expected, and the toilsome preparations for the move, prevented us meeting again until several years had gone by since the day Sannie showed me her needlework. Also travel across the veld was not so easy at the moment: the sluits and vleis were over-full, as Sannie's father had prophesied to me that they would be very soon!

CHAPTER VI

WHILE LIVING ON OUR RENTED FARM ON THE KARROO WE WERE SEARCHING FOR A place of our own to buy. I thought rather longingly about living in the Transvaal and growing flowers for the Johannesburg market. But this presupposed considerable horticultural knowledge, and without that it means a heavy risk of capital. But they grow fields and fields of carnations up there, and it is a joyous way of farming, even if the work is hard. James hates hens, so we could not consider poultry on a large scale either in Natal or the Transvaal. Sugar-planting in Natal was a sealed book to us, and requires a lot of money. Neither did we know anything about the growing of pineapples, though surely it would be nice to eat one's produce! But we now knew something about sheep. Must it be the Karroo again? We went to Beaufort West, to the south of us, and fell in love with the town itself. Its main street is an avenue of pear trees from end to end. I do not know who was the genius who thought of pears in Beaufort West, but each spring the huge old trees yield a glory of blossom, and, later, a fine crop of tummy-aches to the local small boys who climb to devour the hard little pears.

I do not intend to strew this story with statistics about the farming districts of South Africa. The 1820 Settlers' Association in London will drip these off their finger-tips if asked to do so. I only want to show the delight it is to live here in whatever district you may choose.

We visited Natal again, staying this time with friends we had discovered to be living in Durban. They kept two Zulu house-boys, who, in their white drill tunics and shorts, were as intelligent and deft as servants as their forebears had been daring and skilled with their assegais. As they handed the soup I wondered if they knew anything of their quondam chief Dingaan's treachery to Piet Retief. Probably not. They were so exceedingly well trained and civilized.

From Durban we started home again, overland this time. As our train rattled away from Durban station, past a long ledge of scarlet hibiscus, we soon left behind us the coastal sugar plantations and the glittering blue waters of palm-fringed Durban Bay, where South Africans can be seen riding the big breakers on surf-boards decorated with strange sea monsters. Presently the train whirled us through the steep hills of the Berea, past beautiful gardens stocked with cannas, lilies, oleanders, and other sub-tropical flowers, and roomy-looking houses with shady stoeps and sleeping-porches.

At one o'clock we lunched our way along the swaying corridors to the "eet salon" to enjoy a typical South African lunch. First grapefruit was served, followed by pumpkin soup, and a fish course of Cape snoek. Then came mutton

outlets (though most probably these, skilfully cooked and befrilled, came off the ubiquitous goat), accompanied by rings of fried eggplant, sweet potatoes, and a crisp salad. There followed Indian corn on the cob (mealies), to which we added dabs of butter, pepper, and salt, and ate as neatly as possible with our fingers, crunching the juicy white pips off their cobs with our teeth. After this there was a selection of delicious fruits, for in South Africa we "eat more fruit" than in most countries. We chose the tawny lusciousness of paw-paw served with lemon juice and sugar.

As I ate my lunch and looked out of the windows I wished that I could slow down the train to take a closer look at a group of Zulu matrons, each with her baby slung on her back in a hammock of vivid striped blanket, and her hair dressed into a hard high mound with red clay. This form of coiffure indicates the married woman. And I would like to have sketched or even snapped the pretty picture made by a dusky maiden standing lithe and graceful before her palm-shaded hut, winnowing grain with the help of a breeze and a wire sieve. But, alas, we sped by at forty miles an hour, through valleys and tunnels, across bridges hung high above lacy waterfalls, and among arching trees and riots of luxuriant greenery. What a contrast it all was to the semi-arid plains of the great Karroo to westward! But then South Africa is a veritable patchwork quilt of contrasts: there are semi-desert Bechuanaland and Namaqualand, the arid West coast, the Transvaal bushveld, the fertile arable lands of the Cape Province and luxuriant Natal; the brown, black, and white peoples; the fine buildings and humble rondavels; the hot sunny summers, and winters of rain, hail, and even snow. Though even in the winters it is always sunny too. Snowfalls in the Drakensberg Mountains enable South Africans to indulge in ski-ing; and hailstones have fallen in Durban as big as tennis balls. (This is no exaggeration—the stones were photographed alongside the balls. They wounded people badly, ripped open many cars, and broke many windows.)

In the afternoon we passed through beautiful green country backed by the distant blue ranges of the Drakensburg Mountains showing jagged along the skyline. Many farmers here seemed to grow Russian sunflowers, the seeds of which are excellent food for fattening table poultry. More often, however, the entire plant is harvested green, chopped, and stored in silage pits for a winter cattle food. We passed morgen upon morgen of these mammoth flowers with faces the size of soup-plates. This enchanting crop gave way to emerald mealie lands. On the six-foot plants growing in endless rows one glimpsed the bearded cobs among the slim leaves which rustled ceaselessly in the warm, damp breezes of Natal.

A few hours spent at Ladysmith made us realize how terribly difficult the town must have been to defend during the Boer War. It lies in a hollow surrounded by kopjes, steep and rugged and closely overhanging the town, from which the Boers could pour their fire into the place.

Pietermaritzburg was very beautiful. The railway line circled it, so that as we passed by we saw this garden city from all angles.

As we approached the borders of the Orange Free State, and were nearing a place spelt Thaba 'Nchu, and pronounced "Tabanchu", our notice was attracted by a swiftly moving black cloud: a locust swarm.

Thirsting for knowledge, I thrust my head out of the window, and a scudding locust, the vanguard of that fearsome army, hit me stingingly on the cheek. I hastily withdrew and repented my curiosity. In a minute the train was overshadowed and surrounded by myriads of these quaint insects, like large clumsy dragonflies without that pretty creature's lovely colouring. Against the sunlight their opaque wings, whirring in myriads, gave the effect of a noisy snow-storm. The majority of the locusts sought food, but others flopped on the line in thousands, till the track grew slippery as our engine churned in among them. So slippery,

that in a few minutes the engine churned in vain; the wheels revolved but refused to grip the metals, so that the train became held up by the locusts—and there we were stuck!

Later a breakdown gang came to our help, cleared up the track and cleaned the rails so that we could proceed again. Meantime we passengers watched the locusts' work of destruction. They had settled on every green blade and bush in the vicinity, so that in a very short time the green was gone, and the bare brown earth lay exposed and barren to break the local farmers' hearts.

Natives and their piccaninnies, all armed with sacks, appeared as if by magic, and started to collect bags full of locusts. "It's an ill wind that blows nobody any good", and if the mealie farmers lamented, the Kaffirs at any rate looked forward to toasted locust for their supper, with extra money into the bargain from the sale of surplus locusts as fowl food! It was an ironical thought that the smitten farmer should pay money for the wretched insects which had despoiled him.

I felt that night, when the ebony-faced bedding attendant had hired me my sheets and blankets (and taken my three shillings) and I had climbed into my upper bunk, that I was having an exciting journey. Being tired, however, I sincerely hoped that the moonlit night would grant sweet sleep rather than any more South African thrills.

There was no farm to be had at our figure in the Beaufort West region, and the Karroo farms which we inspected in the Britstown district all struck us as overvalued at that time. We did not want to tie a heavy bond around our necks which might sink us if a bad fall in wool prices happened along, or another drought blackened the veld again. So we started to consider places in still other districts. Just then a photograph of South-West Africa in a newspaper attracted our attention. We thought it looked good. Such are the little things which sometimes help towards a decision. So James travelled north-west and looked around South-West Africa, and after ten days' absence returned to give his opinion on that part of this southern continent. He had been impressed with the far north around the wooded regions of Grootfontein, where cattle are farmed. But I, knowing that we had no knowledge of dairying at all, vetoed that idea. Consultations followed, and the outcome was that we decided on hitting the long trail to central South-West Africa, which is yet another sheep country.

Once more, in the damp heat of February this time, we packed up our kit, now considerably reduced by an auction. All such superfluities as wine-glasses, decanters, finger-bowls, and other frills which I had thoughtlessly brought with us, were sold at give-away prices. Comically, the natives bought the finger-bowls, presumably as curios. And of the scant furniture we had collected for our temporary abode we kept two camp-beds and their mattresses, our son's cot, a small sideboard, a gate-legged dining-table, one carver chair, a writing-desk, and the kitchen table. These I padded with straw and sewed up with much sacking and backache, and despatched by farm wagon to the station. James attended to the animals and implements, and found it no joke entraining eight hundred unwilling sheep, numerous goats, a dog, a crate of fowls, the wagon, and sixteen donkeys. Liesel, the aristocratic Swiss Saanen goat we had bought for the benefit of our small boy, was successfully herded with the flocks half-way to the dorp, after which point she evaded the shepherds and galloped back to her beloved green orchard on the farm. James had to make a special journey with her in the Lizzie and personally push her into her railway truck.

The kit and creatures, with a supply of baled lucerne and dog biscuit, two shepherds (Gladstone and Disraeli had agreed to come with us), and a young Boer hired for the journey, left by their special train two days before we followed up by mail. The pup was now a yellow mongrel with a fine curly tail, but he was a darling, and I wished he could have travelled with us, but James said "No!" We

had christened him Klinkie (which means "little one"), but later changed his name to Curly in honour of his amazing tail.

Accompanied by two cats, we spent the last two days in a dorp boarding-house, to recover from our exertions in despatching our possessions. The landlady was a stout, kind soul of the type known as motherly. It was she too, like Sannie's mother, who gave me a clearer insight into the calm, placid way in which women of this country undertake the duties of veld housekeeping. Going into the backyard the second morning of our stay to retrieve some oddments of washing, I found the good soul standing before a trestle table set out in the yard. On it rested the huge corpse of an ostrich, flayed and gory to see. A large bath-tub alongside the table was already half full of strips of raw meat. Blood ran along the table and dripped to the ground. The woman's arms up to the elbows, and her hands, were crimson. Her apron was spattered liberally with red, and even her face had not escaped. She was making biltong.

"Oh, you poor dear!" I exclaimed. "What a dreadful job!" I was shuddering inwardly. The biltong-maker looked at me with mild surprise in her bovine eyes, gently gesticulated with a bloody knife, and said slowly:

"I like working with meat."

Biltong is meat, generally game, such as springbok, gemsbok, or ostrich, cured and dried into sticks. The freshly-shot carcass is cut into long strips about two inches thick each way. Each strip is then slit up the centre to within an inch of the end, so that it may conveniently be doubled over a wire for drying. When cut ready the meat is laid in coarse salt for about twenty-four hours. If liked, pepper and other spices may be added to the salt. Next day all the strips of salted meat are hung over a taut wire to dry in a cool, sunless place. When quite dried and hard the biltong is packed away in boxes and tins, to be used later as required either grated on bread-and-butter, or finely shredded, or sliced with a sharp knife, and eaten alone. Biltong, with its salty tang, makes a good addition to salads, and is a very nourishing food. It is very suitable eating through the hot weather. The average Boer can travel for days across the veld with a water-bag, a few sticks of biltong, and a little bag of rusks or coarse bread strung to his saddle, and I have heard that the Boer War was largely fought on this diet. It made the Boer commandos independent of the vital supply columns for which the British must so anxiously have waited on some occasions.

Our train for South-West Africa left at night, so we passed out of the Brits-town district without seeing it again, and were able to sleep through the first eight hours of that long journey. If ever you have to spend two or three days cooped up in a South African railway compartment you will know what is meant by the word "tedious." The line is narrow gauge, the coaches are of the corridor type, so there is not much room left in the passenger compartments. Into a small space of cushioned dustrap four people in the first class, and six in the second class, are penned night and day. For this journey we managed to get a two-berth coupé. It was about the size of a shoe-box, but it had the advantage of privacy.

During the first day some unscrupulous traveller helped himself to our precious water-bag, which we had slung on the outer handle of our door for coolness' sake. So the next night we had to choose between thirst and the doubtful and tepid filter water placed at the end of each corridor. This also gave out in the end with the rush there was on it in that damp, oppressive weather. By day you can order iced drinks or tea from the "ect salon", but by night your tongue cleaves to the roof of your mouth, or hangs out like a flannel to dry, unless you possess a water-bag.

In the morning a boy came with a broom and a cheery grin to clean out our compartment. He vigorously stirred up the dust to spiral gaily round us. Natives of this country never dream of opening doors and windows before starting to

sweep. Ask him, or her, where he thinks the dust will go, and he grins yet more cheerfully, and says brightly, "Ek vit ne, baas" ("I don't know, master"), and leaves it at that.

As usual on a long journey, meals broke the monotony. The dining-cars here are efficiently run. The country's wines are good and cheap, and always available when travelling. Drakenstein, for instance, a clear sparkling white wine like bottled sunshine, is only a shilling a pint. The food is attractively served by white-coated stewards, and on a long trip books of tickets for meals can be bought at a reduced price. We appreciated the stewards' deft waiting after having been subject to the slapstick efforts to please of Katrina, Sarah, and the rest.

At Upington we crossed the Orange River, and, as the train rumbled over the bridge, realized we looked on a river of romance. The Orange River, which rises in the Drakensberg Mountains, the other side of the Union, is a thousand-mile cleft across Southern Africa. It is South Africa's longest river, and its most permanently running stream. Yet all its deep lower reaches are unnavigable and useless except for irrigation. Even for this the water must be pumped up, because the river runs through deep chasms in mountainous country. The mouth of the river, where it flows into the Atlantic just above Alexander Bay, is guarded by a sand bar which at no time or tide allows a passage to ships, however small. And about eighty miles below Upington the river goes over a great waterfall higher than the famous Victoria Falls of the Zambesi.

A wealth of diamonds has been found at Alexander Bay, and it is undoubted that these stones, more magnificent than those discovered anywhere else, are washed down by the Orange River. Legend has it that somewhere in the grim, unexplored mountains below the falls there is a crater of diamonds guarded by a snake-monster. It is said that the diamonds sift down through this funnel, or crater, and are washed down to the estuary above Alexander Bay. Gold and other precious minerals are said to be in these mountains too, but who can afford to consider finding them when there is no means of removing them from such a remote and inaccessible region?

Now, in 1943, comes news that even the implacable Orange River is going to be harnessed and tamed by man's ingenuity. There are to be some 30,000 morgen of new grain farms along the Orange River. And there is to be a barge canal from the river to the dry districts of Bethuli, Carnarvon, and Willesden. It is a vast irrigation scheme that is planned. It will mean employment for thousands of workmen, technicians, and engineers before the farmers finally come to take over. On Tuesday, June 8th, 1943, Cyril Watling, in his South African news letter, quoted General Smuts as having recently said, "South Africa must throw open her doors to new man-power." This scheme obviously will absorb some of it. In 1942 South Africa produced twenty-two million bags of maize; she evidently intends that her grain production shall grow. But it is not only in agriculture that the country forges ahead. It is said that her steel production after this war will be tremendous. South Africa is going to be highly industrialized in the near future.

At Seeheim there is a branch line of the railway to Luderitzbucht on the coast of South-West Africa. Before the discovery of diamonds at Luderitzbucht this place was no more than a tiny seaport for guano boats and small fishing ships, and consisted of a handful of tin bungalows and sheds. The district is a pure desert of sand, and every drop of water had to be transported to it over the newly-built railway track from Seeheim.

Then a railway ganger picked up a diamond in the sand while at his work keeping the track clear of the ever shifting sand—and became a millionaire! Stauch was his name, and we saw him in Windhoek when we went to live in South-West

Africa. He seemed to think money rather an overrated commodity, and lived very simply.

After Stauch's discovery, Luderitz (as it is called locally) sprang into a large mining community with a Wild West atmosphere. But it was German territory then, and the Germans, with habitual Teutonic pompousness, built amongst the tin-shack town some imposing public buildings, incongruous in such a setting to any mind but a German one.

Our first important stop was at Keetmanshoop, the second city of South-West Africa, and when we drew up we found the ground around the train was, as usual, crowded with local society.

Our train gushed into the station with a hiss of steam, as if the engine were heaving a huge sigh of relief at the prospect of a ten-minute rest after its long toil. The long line of coaches pulls up with a squeal of brakes. Then passengers' heads emerge from the windows, many of them dishevelled heads, with hot, bored, and weary faces. Some have travelled all the way up from Cape Town, and are stiff with tiredness after several days in the train. They gaze down with red-rimmed eyes at the swarming conglomeration of people on the ground below. Local farmers are clambering up into the dining-car for iced beer and a chat, and to collect the latest news and gossip from Cape Town. White-coated train stewards get terrifically busy handing down cones of ice cream to the children on the ground in exchange for their tickies and sixpences. Stout perspiring hausfraus haggle with other stewards for precious fruit and vegetables, for many mail trains in this country act as unofficial greengrocers. The farmers can grow their own green-stuffs, but dorp and townspeople in some districts find gardening impossible to any extent, owing to an inadequate water supply.

Native piccanins—spindle-legged, pot-bellied, beady-eyed little gamins in their brown skins—grin up at the train windows with extended palms, or turn somersaults in the sand, for which accomplishment they invite reward with pennies, sandwiches, or anything else; there is nothing their acquisitiveness cannot appreciate. Ragged native boys shout and struggle with luggage. Native women, each with a baby strapped on her back with a shawl, squat on the ground in rows, smoking their home-made tin pipes (shaped like cream-horn moulds) and chattering vociferously. For ten minutes we hear the Tower of Babel: there rise from below Afrikaans, English, Yiddish, German, and the tongue-clicking dialects of the natives, to drum on our bewildered ears.

An old native turns his sweat-shined black face up to our window.

"Missus buy? Just one sheeling, missus," he pleads as he proffers a large watermelon. I shake my head. We have had melon every meal in the "eet salon" since leaving the Karroo. He passes on, and is followed by a more prosperous-looking young native selling karosses. These are fur rugs made of the wild-animal skins of the country, combined with Angora, and even Kaffir, goat-skins. But the sun blazed down, and we shuddered at the mere suggestion of a fur rug, though his skins of leopard, dassies, grey wild cat and rooikat were very beautiful. Such rugs would cost many guineas in London, while his top price for beginning a haggle was only "dree pund" apiece.

A small dark girl catches the eye from behind the fur-seller, and holds up a strip of Kaffir beadwork. She is a slim, attractive urchin, with large black eyes, clad in no more than a swirl of ragged skirt of blue and red striped cotton material. She looks about six years old. Her beautiful white teeth show in a flashing smile, and referring to her beadwork she says:

"Seekispence, missus." The glass beads wink in the sun as I hold down my hand for the bauble. I examine the intricate pattern of the work, and the little girl thinks I am hesitating. Quickly she pipes up.

"Ticky, ticky! You buy!" Poor little mite. All those hours of patient

work which the strip of beadwork represented offered eagerly for a mere three-pence! I throw sixpence down to her, and delight her beyond measure by adding a slice of cake with pink icing on top, the icing sticky and melting, but entrancingly acceptable all the same.

Time is nearly up. The Tower of Babel crescendoes to an excited roar. Then a bell clangs and the whistle goes, the engine shrieks self-importantly, and the guard's green flag waves. We pull out heavily, and very slowly gather a bit of speed with much clanking. Some passengers flip down a shower of pennies to see a final scramble among the piccanins. Then Keetmanshoop drops behind like a white dot in the distance, and we wind once again like a brown caterpillar across the miles and miles of hang-all.

It is South-West Africa's misfortune that the railway line from the Orange River (which forms a natural southern boundary) right up to Windhoek, the capital town in the north, runs through its flattest and most uninteresting strip of country. Obviously the engineers who laid the line very sensibly took the road of least resistance. So for ever after, travellers looking from a railway carriage window do not see this country as it really is in its better parts, and they exclaim, as I did to James when we had passed Keetmanshoop:

"Ye gods! This no man's land is more desolate, treeless, and bare even than the Karroo." Admittedly it was green at the present time, but I could imagine what it might be like in a drought.

"Wait!" quoth James. "You see that plateau rising up to eastward there? That stretches for two hundred miles northward, parallel all the way to this railway line, and it is covered with some of the finest grazing and vegetation in southern Africa. This half desert we are passing through is only a very narrow strip."

Allowing for James's habitual optimism, I took his word for it, but remained silent. Later, after some years of living in the country, I came to the conclusion that this land, taken from west to east, is like a layer cake. The coastal belt is pure desert sand; then comes usable veld, giving way again to the arid railway line; then ten miles east of this rises the Kalk, the plateau which stretches for about a hundred miles inland till it in turn again gives way to desert—the great Kalahari Desert.

As regards farming, the country is, roughly speaking, divided into two districts. In the far north around Grootfontein, above Windhoek, there is cattle-farming. South of Windhoek sheep of every kind are farmed: Karakuls (Persian lamb), Merinos, and those black-headed mutton sheep with heavy tails of pure fat, yielding about four to six pounds of dripping! The southern portion of the country is too dry for cattle, and for this very reason is eminently suitable for sheep. North of Windhoek, the firm of Liebig have large cattle farms, and make their meat extracts. The coming of dried milk must be of great help to the cattle farmers up in those remote parts. Butter and cheeses seem to have been their mainstay before, while the Walvis Bay cold storage handled their beef. They made one marvellous little round cream cheese flavoured with caraway seed. Its taste was heavenly, but it always smelt like a neglected mortuary!

CHAPTER VII

IT WAS ABOUT TWENTY MILES SHORT OF MARIENTAL STATION, AS WE PUFFED ALONG the billiard-table flats, that we had a good view of some of the country's wild life.

A group of some ten wild ostriches lost their silly little heads and careered madly along beside the train for a mile or so before they had the sense to veer right and race away towards the Kalk, whose ramparts still followed us eastward.

I write from now onwards of South-West Africa, but although South Africans of the Union speak of it as another country it is to all intents and purposes still South Africa. It is administered by a man selected always by the Union Government, and is a protectorate of that Government. So the newcomer, at all events, must be forgiven for calling it South Africa. Its locality therefore makes no difference to my effort to describe a new settler's life in South Africa. I have found the conditions of life and living, climate and customs, very much as in the Union, with but slight differences in local colour, such as one must always expect from province to province.

Mariental was our destination, and finally we clanged into the station. The usual crowd and crush buzzed on the ground and besieged the train. Men in open-throated shirts and extra wide-brimmed felt hats of Tom Mix design, Boer women and German, some of the former dressed in rusty black, the latter in more vivid colours, be vies of children after ice creams, natives, stray goats, and numerous dogs, seethed, chattered, bleated, and barked.

The native women of this district, belonging largely to the Herrero tribe, are a striking feature to the newcomer, as these dames are a type quite apart from the Kaffirs of the Karroo, or any other women of southern Africa. To begin with, instead of wearing the more or less up-to-date cast-offs of the modern white woman, as did our house-girls down south, they still wear the quaint, old-fashioned dress copied from the early settlers' wives out here, complete with leg-o'-mutton sleeves, very tight-fitting, high-waisted bodice, and full skirt trailing the ground. They use at least eight yards of print for a skirt. To this chic ensemble they add high, multi-coloured turbans—crimson, blue, magenta, gold—in which they stow their beadwork, brass wire jewellery, and other small belongings. They love beads and wear strings and strings of them.

They walk invariably with a slow, haughty gait, smoke clay and tin pipes unceasingly, and have a way of disdain to answer when spoken to, unless it be to burst into a cascade of chatter in their own tongue, which consists seemingly of a series of clicking noises made with the tongue against the teeth, the palate, or the back of the throat. They say that the Herrero uses three words for anyone else's one! The language is exceedingly difficult to learn, and much depends on the right use of these three different clicks. One or other of them put before the same sound entirely alters the meaning of the idea you intend to convey. I once heard that a European preacher talking to a native congregation startled his listeners by confusing the Holy Ghost with a sweet potato, simply by using the wrong click before the one word which served both!

As domestic servants the Herrero women are useless, as I found later to my sorrow. This does not mean that they are unintelligent. Far from it. But they suffered so much under German rule that they have little use for any white person now, and show their indifference to the South African by "acting dumb", kind though they know their new rulers to be. It is natural that they should want their own country back for themselves, for before the coming of the white man they were the premier tribe of South-West Africa. The women of the tribe are the most beautiful native women of southern Africa. They have fine, clear-cut features, skins that are a lovely, clear golden brown, and lips that are far from too full or coarse. Even their smile is unique, for it is then that you glimpse their tribal custom of filing a little V-shaped gap in their front teeth!

One Herrero dame we employed later brought about a comi-tragic catastrophe in our household. The baas had been out shooting, and on coming home said, "Tell the girl to cook the two birds on the stoep." I passed on the message to our

henchwoman. For our next dinner she brought in two tiny corpses on a vast meat-dish. The brace of birds which James had shot still lay on the stoep table; she had cooked two of the baby sparrows from the nest among the rafters of the stoep!

The word "Herrero", with the r's well rolled, is meant to represent the whirring sound made by an assegai when thrown. There are only about 25,000 Herreros in South-West Africa today. It is estimated that some 50,000 of them were killed by cruelty during the German occupation and misrule of the country. Because they were the first race of the country, the Germans harried them even more heartlessly than they ever did the Ovambos in the north, the Berg Damaras, the Bastards, or the Hottentots. They had a pretty idea of sending Herrero offenders against co-operation to die of starvation in thousands on the bleak guano islands of the grim west coast! But the Herreros were, and are, a proud people, and they revolted in 1904. It took the Germans seven years to quell that revolt. And ever since then the Herreros have had no use for any white man. If they loathed and despised the Germans, they merely tolerate the white of any other nationality. And can one blame them? During their days of terror and horror the Herrero women vowed that they would have no more children to suffer and die, as they had done in their thousands. Today, when they might well lift their self-imposed ban, it seems that few Herrero women can have a child. Have the Teutons left them the legacy of extinction?

The Ovambos have been found to be the most efficient in the mines. On the farms the Hottentots, and Berg Damaras, and sometimes the Herreros, are employed. The Berg Damaras are Bantu in blood, Hottentot in language, and, in their natural state, Bushmen in habit!

When we first heard the word "Bastard" first used so casually in South-West we felt a bit hot under the collar. We knew of the Cape-coloureds of the Union, who liked to be thought as white as they could get away with, and would bitterly have resented the description of "bastard". But here, in South-West, although he originated in the same way as the Cape-coloured, through the promiscuous mating of white man and Hottentot, the Bastard now considers himself a race apart of which he is proud. With his olive complexion, he does not care about being black or white. He does not think of it any more than the tinted Southern European. He lives mostly in the Bastard Reserves with its capital at Rehoboth, half-way between Mariental and Windhoek, and the country they own is some of the best farming country in the whole of South-West.

Since South-West was a German possession before the 1914-1918 war, it still has a considerable German population, and many German characteristics. Evidence of that nation's ideas on colonization is everywhere, especially in the form of the imposing buildings they put up in the towns specially favoured, such as Keetmanshoop, and in Windhoek, the capital. But the Germans were never able to colonize the country in any real sense of the word. Stupidly, and arrogantly, they set about making it another Germany! They came up against the native at every turn, just as they do throughout Europe today, and the people, the climate and the land defied them. Finally we beat them ourselves, and tried to clear up the mess and start afresh, when the South African Government took over.

Preceded by a native hotel porter, respectably arrayed in white drill, who carried our hand luggage, we waded through the soft sand to one of the two hotels with which this little dorp was blessed. How good it was to stretch cramped legs after such long imprisonment in the train! As we ploughed along in the wake of the boy I saw a brown hen ostrich mince sedately up "Main Street". I heard later that the bird was the pet of one of the railway gangers whose tin shanties flanked the station.

Looking around the squat little dorp, with its peppers and oleanders planted

before the house opposite the station, and the hitching-post outside the hotel, I was struck by the resemblance of the whole place to the woolly and wild towns of American cowboy films. It would not have been in the least surprising had a man in sombrero and fringed chaps, with a six-shooter in each hand, plunged out of one of the flat-faced white houses and begun blazing around him in the reckless manner of cinema-land!

We were thankful to reach the shade of the hotel stoep and be once more out of the hot sun.

"Now for a cold beer," quoth James.

"Now for a bath," said I emphatically. But I was to be reminded that bathrooms in veld hotels were scarce and weird. This, my first bath in this dorp's hotel, proved an adventure. I asked the native porter, who turned out to be the butler-cum-head-bottle-washer of the place as well, the whereabouts of the bathrooms.

"Badroom, missus?" he grinned --and my heart sank as I heard the word used in the singular--"Ober der, missus."

He pointed across the hotel's public yard, in which the entire district was wont to park its cars, wagons and traps when visiting the dorp. There, in a low white wall, the bathroom door gaped next to a garage. Indeed, the outer walls of the "badkamer" were as lavishly plastered with petrol, tyre, and car advertisements as the garage itself.

Kimono clad, I braved the eyes of numerous owner-drivers, crossed the sunny yard, and dived into the dimness of the bathroom. The door was quite innocent of bolt or lock; the window knew no curtain; the bath had neither paint nor plug, and the cold cement floor was devoid of a bath-mat. However, the obliging porter-cum-butler had carried me a generous quantity of warm water, so I improvised a window curtain from my kimono, and a plug from my rubber sponge, and splashed. Presently I was swathed in a big bath-towel; my toes curled up off the chilly floor; my hair, screwed into a little apple atop my head, was supported by a tooth-brush spiked through it; my face shone and dripped with wetness. Though admittedly not looking my best, I was at last clean and happy again. At this moment the bathroom door swung open, and a bright young man in a dot-and-dash pullover strode in and asked for a sparking plug. I blinked at him with dripping lashes. He simply said "Omigawdl!" and retired precipitately.

We had had similar adventures before this. Once, in the Union, I had narrowly escaped being widowed in another hotel bathroom. Mine host had proudly introduced us to his patent shower-bath, a contraption consisting of a perforated petrol-tin and a small water-butt, suspended from the roof by an intricate mass of ropes and pulleys to which Heath Robinson himself could scarcely have done justice. James went off to bathe first, and when ready he gaily pulled the rope which operated the shower. Sure enough, down came the water, but with it came also the entire shower-bath, lock, stock and barrel (or butt). He told me afterwards that the fiendish outfit missed his head by a split inch.

Then elsewhere, one bleak winter's night, a hotel proprietor responded to my request for a bath by leading me across a windswept yard and down some steps to an outhouse like a Bloody Tower. Floor, bath and walls were of icy stone and cement.

"Any hot water?" I asked.

"No, missus, only cold," replied mine host in a voice which reprimanded me for asking for anything beyond a necessity of existence. In the end I secured a pint jug partially filled with tepid H_2O in our bedroom. James used a gill for shaving, my son an eggcupful for his hands, and I managed with the rest and some cold cream.

In yet another dorp hotel the tap was deceptive. It yielded water at first.

Joyfully I lathered all over, only to find that the tap had suddenly ceased to function owing to a lack of pressure somewhere. Having removed all the soap with a towel, and disgustedly dressed again, I sought to lodge a complaint. A boy led me to his baas, at the moment serving in his bar, and announced to that worthy and some twenty beer-drinkers:

"Baas, this missus him want a bath!"

Every man present laid down his tankard and looked round. I fled. Apparently a bath was impossible at those times when the baas was flushing the bar's bottle-cooler. Water pressure for both together was insufficient, and of course the bottle-cooler was much the more important.

Only once did I find a perfect bathroom in an up-country African hotel. As usual there was only the one bathroom for the whole hotel, but it was a gem. White-tiled walls, gleaming tessellated floor, bevelled mirrors, plate-glass shelves, porcelain taps, fitted basin, nickel towel-rails, and shimmering white bath. Yet there was one drawback: as yet the water had not been laid on.

But these bathing adventures have added a zest to life on the veld from time to time. Indeed, the newcomer is much more likely to experience comedy and adventure with baths than wild beasts such as the story-books lead you to believe!

The room allotted to us was in a row of five, fronted by a stoep. We had but one window beside the doorway, and as there was no through draught the room was very stuffy, especially in this February weather. The first night we suffered the steamy heat, but decided to sleep out on the stoep in future. The doorway was too narrow to allow of the beds being taken outside, so we dumped our mattresses on the stoep floor each night and slept on the ground, regardless of possible snakes, scorpions, and all comers. The heat-stricken occupants of the other rooms did likewise. It was community sleeping for everyone! James thought of camping out in the yard, until I reminded him that some vehicle might bowl over his face at any moment.

The first night we slept out our sleep was broken by late arrivals who came by car about 3 a.m. Distances are so great here that folk are apt to arrive anywhere, anywhen. I awoke to hear voices above my recumbent form, while someone stumbled over James and landed with both feet on my hair. I sat up with a jerk.

"My dear! Could you tell this boy to go away," I said sleepily but indignantly to James. A European-sounding laugh greeted us out of the darkness above. Explanations and apologies followed from both sides, and although none of us saw each other till morning we thus became introduced to yet another friend.

After a day's breathing-space James collected the Lizzie from the station and motored out to look again at the farm he had decided to buy while on his former trip up to South-West Africa. Had it not been for the child I should have accompanied him. But Lizzie was possessed only of a canvas hood, and I could not experiment on a thirty-mile drive of unknown track euphemistically called a road.

James came back with the news that although some sheep had died in their trucks, as was to be expected perhaps, losses were slight, and everyone and everything had reached the farm intact, except the carver chair. This, apparently, had been wrenched off the top of the piled-up wagon which had taken our kit out, by the outspreading branches of a kameelboom, or camel thorn tree.

We arranged that I should live at the hotel for a month so as to get a rest after our strenuous life in Britstown and the railway journey, and also to enable James to get the earth floors of our shack on the farm cemented.

In addition, a Boer family were squatting on the farm, having been given

permission by the previous owner to do so until we arrived. And I did not want to turn them out at a moment's notice. With their average Boer family of nine children, a sudden move would have been difficult for them.

So James spent his time between the farm and the dorp, coming in for a good meal whenever he tired of his own amateur cooking. We both became acquainted with our new neighbours during this month.

On looking around Mariental we found the dorp consisted of a cluster of about two dozen one-storeyed buildings, including the two hotels and three general stores. In the dorps of this country the number of stores and lodging-houses always seems out of proportion until you remember that they cater for a large and scattered district. A big percentage of the country's population, both black and white, lives out of sight, out "beyond". Some of Mariental's erections were of corrugated iron, while some houses were a combination of iron and brick, plastered and whitewashed. The whole collection lay huddled on the upper shores of a river-bed, whose stream in the rainy season flowed through a deep mimosa-fringed channel about a quarter of a mile to westward. The dorp was just a group of dazzling little white bungalows planted in the sand, with no gardens to grace them at all, for the water problem was acute here. At that time all drinking-water was railed down in tanks from a place called Tsumis, a hundred miles up the line, while water for other purposes was carted in drums pulled by donkeys from the pools left by the river waters of the previous wet season. Later a dam was constructed on the river, water was filtered, and the situation so improved that Mariental even began to take up gardening.

Most South African rivers flow only during the season of rains; for the greater part of the year you can walk dry-footed across their rock-strewn sandy beds. The fellow who wrote the hymn saying that "Afric's sunny fountains roll down their golden sands" must have had an imagination which jibbed at writing the truth, which should read "Seep into golden sands"—which scans just as well, anyway.

Yet the names of so many South African dorps and towns end in "fontein", such as Bloemfontein, Koffiefontein, Springfontein, not to mention the place called Fourteen Streams, that one cannot help believing that South Africa once possessed many natural springs and flowing streams, where in most cases but a name remains now. It all points to the alarming fact indicated in the last chapter—that the country was being dried up by erosion, deforestation, and other such follies of its people, until recently checked.

Mariental's peculiarity lay in the fact that, although the place was situated in a river bed, the deepest holes drilled had yielded nothing but a weak supply of nasty brackish water. As a rule you have to dig down only a few feet through the apparently dry sand of an African riverbed to find at any rate a little moisture seeping up, and many a lost traveller's life has been saved by the knowledge of this fact, when in ignorance of it he would surely have died of thirst.

Yet although Mariental was practically waterless, up on the Kalk plateau, only six miles distant here from the railway line and dorp, clear water can be found almost anywhere you care to drill at an average depth of 150 feet.

Artesian water is one of the great blessings of Southern Africa. Even where water is scarce on the veld there is plenty underneath. There is no farm that has not a few windmills over bore-holes, and some dorps also depend entirely on artesian water for their supply. De Aar, in the Karroo, is a forest of windmills.

Of course a huge Dutch Reformed church towered over Mariental, standing aloof and alone, stark and high, on rising ground across the railway. It was just such a massive building as dominates every South African dorp. Piety runs to building huge churches which are filled to overflowing at the inauguration service,

and must remain empty for evermore, except at *Nagmaal* times, when they fill to bulging-point again. Many of them are used for this Communion service but once in three or even six months, for the parish of a predikant is usually several hundred square miles of veld, containing some half-dozen dorps, each with its vast church to be served in turn. The predikant for Mariental lived two hundred miles away in Windhoek, and our dorp church served a useful purpose as a schoolhouse for the greater part of the year.

Nagmaal was held in Mariental twice a year. On these occasions, in all dorps, a temporary wagon camp always springs up around the church, for the farmer folk of the district trundle in from all directions, and over great distances off the veld, for the event. *Nagmaal* is not only a religious, but a social and business, occasion, even less to be missed than any mere dance. *Nagmaal* affords opportunities for family reunions, business deals, christenings, wooings, weddings, political arguments, and sales of work and other charitable functions. All are crammed into the few days of a *Nagmaal*.

The lumbering tented wagons can be seen arriving to take up their stand outside the graveyard. This is just a section of the dun-coloured, shelving plain enclosed by chicken-wire, inside which several rows of pebbly mounds mark the graves. Here the donkey and oxen teams are outspanned, and hobbled to be turned loose for grazing. Fowls, brought to provide eggs, are turned out of their crates, which have swung sickeningly under the wagons during the trek. Goats brought along for the pot, or to provide milk, are released. And sacks and tins of food are off-loaded.

In the general excitement of pitching camp, greetings are exchanged by the Viljoens, the Van de Merwes, the Van de Westhuisens, the Steyns, the Bergers, and the Groenewalds, and numerous other families of such typical names, all acquainted, and many of them vaguely related. For the backvelder is partial to marrying near his or her home region.

All through Friday and Saturday the wagons trickle into town to swell the wagon camp, until soon the wide plain on which the church is perched looks like a market place. Several dozen mongrel fowl strut about, goats nibble unguarded clothing (especially if it be green), tables and upturned boxes are everywhere, adorned with family crockery and cooking utensils, enamelware and alarm clocks, all reminiscent of Petticoat Lane in London.

On Sunday morning the church bell tolls out its one note, which serves alike for weddings, funerals, and *Nagmaal*. The occupants of the wagon camp wash the visible parts of their anatomy and dress in their finery. The elders of the kirk each puts on his "manel"—a black tail-coat of no recognized cut, generally green with age, frayed, and adorned with unmatched buttons. It is the uniform of the deacon, and the hallmark of the community's esteem. Privacy is ensured largely by the fact that each party is too preoccupied to pay any attention to those dressing in or near other wagons.

At last everyone is ready. A stream of worshippers trails into the church from the wagon camp; and from the dorp down the hill groups of people in Sunday best are sedately walking churchwards too. Soon they will be seated in the church, the women on one side and the men on the other, for mixed praying is not to be thought of. The bell stops tolling, our goatee-bearded predikant comes in, and the service has begun.

After the Communion service there may be a couple of christenings and a couple of weddings, for folk must take these rare chances of getting such ceremonies off their chests. Otherwise you must be prosaically wed before a mere magistrate in his office, or go without being christened *pro tem*.

On Monday the wagons begin to inspan and disappear. By the middle of the week they will all have gone, thirty, fifty, a hundred or more miles away, back

to the hidden farmhouses in the folds of the backveld. The great event of *Nagmaal* is over for another six months.

During our stay in Mariental we experienced our first sheepskin dance. A "sheepskin" is really an impromptu affair at a farmhouse, but the term is now often used for similar dances in the dorps.

The orchestra, hastily scratched together, was a young Boer with his wheezy concertina, a gramophone, and a small boy who blew ex-officio blasts on a toy trumpet. The young Boer and the gramophone had different ideas about rhythm and timing and just when to start and stop, but that only made it all the more interesting. The dance floor was of patched lineolium, and we all wore what we liked, from full-blast evening dress and boiled shirts to tennis flannels and short cotton frocks. And it was a surprise to no one when an engine-greaser in all his war paint, off a goods train standing in the station for quarter of an hour, dashed in for a quick one and a dance. He pounced on me for a partner. That his great hands left black marks on the back of my neck which would have delighted Scotland Yard's fingerprint department did not matter at all. Supper there was none, but the bar did a terrific trade, and by midnight old enemies, inspired by numerous large tots of dop, were throwing each other out into the alleged garden, where they collapsed and slept side by side like brothers under the oleanders till dawn. Then, I believe, it was the duty of that ever-obliging porter-butler to upend them again and send them on their way—hardly rejoicing, but happy enough!

Dop is South Africa's own brandy, a fiery spirit which buys heady bliss at 6/6 a bottle, unless you are very hard up and must buy the inferior, still fiercer, kind at 4/6 a quart. It is sometimes called "Hell's Delight" or "Hell With the Lid Off". Until you get used to it just one peg of dop can make you feel utterly ga-ga. I once heard a newcomer sniff the air and say, "Anyone spilt methylated?" There was no methylated about, but—someone had just opened a bottle of 4/6 dop!

But to get back to dancing—our dorp balls are very grand affairs nowadays, and quite different from that sheepskin of years ago. For Mariental has grown. It has sprouted new stores, an imposing stone-built bank, some new and bigger bungalows, a real schoolhouse, and also a Government Building, housing the post office, magistrate's court, and other offices pertaining to our city fathers. Also a pumping station, and the river water scheme supplies the place with all household water.

Both hotels have been vastly improved and redecorated. We have a big cheerful dance hall for the Christmas, Hospital, Charity and New Year dances, as for the numerous hops we indulge with no excuse at all. Proper "dress" is now much worn, although, South Africa being a very free country, you are still at liberty to come draped in the kitchen curtains if you wish. By the way, there is no way of hiring clothes here, so everyone knows if you possess an evening outfit or not. Sometimes we women get a bit catty and say to each other, "Here she comes in her old red crêpe again!"

Sometimes we go in for fancy-dress dances, and our costumes, which are home made, are awful and wonderful, and very clever we think. And always the atmosphere is of flying confetti, paper chains, Chinese lanterns, false noses, rattles, and hooters, with a hilarious supper at midnight. In the yard (outside the bathroom), cars, Cape carts, and many weird vehicles are parked in rows, for the district has increased its population, and a couple of hundred people now take the dance floor where but twenty couples danced some years ago. Likewise prams are also parked in rows on a secluded side stoep, for no one is going to let the

possession of an infant stop their fun. Miraculously, the accommodating babies sleep through the din as in their own cots at home. Perhaps they like the distant music from the dance room—not so distant really!

We farm folk gladly jolt our way into town to these dances from all directions over any distances, putting up with friends, or indulging in a hotel room for the few hours of "night" which remain after the dance peters out about 3 or 4 a.m. Those who have no children to consider often return home immediately, motoring through the veld's silence in the cool dawn. But since the farmer is his own master, a few stay in town through the next day, to transact some business or have a hair of the dog that bit them in the bar last night.

One thing remains the same as of old: the bar still does a howling trade, and men still sleep in the cool of the moonlit oleanders, thereby saving a hotel bill, for which the proprietor no doubt forgives them. Officially at these dances the bar closed at midnight, but the policeman on duty went home and changed into mufti while the barman shut the front door and opened the back door of his bottled preserve! Then came the policeman in a lounge suit, and all was well.

Besides dances, moonlight picnics have always been popular. We have them under the mimosas in the dry river-bed, where we sometimes eat and drink and play silly games. And of course the natives think us quite mad and moonstruck.

A bi-weekly and regular thrill in Mariental is the arrival of the mail train. The excitement was greater still when once, during that first stay of ours in the dorp, the mail rolled in thirty-six hours late! Heavy rains had fallen down-country, washing away some track, with the result that our train had been held up. So instead of coming at midday, it steamed in at midnight a day and a half late. The whole town turned out, and behaved like kids going to see the puff-puff. Some of us had already gone to bed, but we got up again. James was away at the farm, but as the station was only two hundred yards off it seemed safe to leave my small boy to sleep alone for half an hour. The atmosphere at the station that night was charged with hilarious laughter, and that balloons-and-confetti feeling, though some of the long-distance passengers looked a bit weary. Although it was not Christmas or New Year, crackers were laid on the line, so that eventually the train departed with pops and bangs.

After enjoying this Bedlam-let-loose at the station until the mail pushed out on its way north again, I returned to my room, and to my dismay found the baby gone! Then, as I stood for a second gaping in horror, I saw one fat foot protruding from under the bed, and discovered what had happened. All those hotel beds were humped in the middle and had lumpy straw mattresses, so without myself to hold him in place the infant had rolled to the floor between the bed and the wall. Happily the bed was low, so the fall had not even wakened him.

In later years, when settled on our farm, we generally made our visits to the dorp coincide with the twice-weekly coming of the mail train from Cape Town, or with the down-train from Windhoek. It was our only chance of buying fish. We made a good friend at court and generally got some. Also it was fun to sit in the dining-car over beer, making new friends, or by marvellous coincidence finding again some previous acquaintance.

When my month in the dorp was nearly over the Boer family on the farm had not yet vacated, so I decided to leave the baby with a new-made friend for a day and go with James to the place to give them the hint to go.

Taking sandwiches and bottled beer, we left the dorp in Lizzie early in the morning and set out eastward into a land of gaunt stony kopjes. We came to the Kalk cliffs six miles out but did not mount the plateau at this point, for although a track existed we had been warned that it was a very bad and steep one. Instead, we continued straight ahead through a pass for about two more miles, and then crossed the dry bed of a stream where thorny mimosas grew. This proved to be

the outlet made some years ago by the breaking of a big earth embankment which had dammed the rainwater collected in the lower end of a long pan beyond. The road swooped over the embankment and down into the pan, which was as flat as a table, about ten miles long by two wide, and encircled by the flat-topped hills of the Kalk. These huge pans, generally quite dry, such as Verneuk Pan, well known in connection with Sir Malcolm Campbell's speed trials, are a great feature of South African scenery.

Though warming up already, the morning air was rain-washed and invigorating. We went down the dam wall with a whoop, and anticipated a swallow flight along that long pan, when the radiator cap, which was always disgustingly loose, flew off on a jet of steam. We stopped and investigated. The garage boy had forgotten to fill up with water! We looked at each other and we looked around. Away to the right was a sheet of blue water fringed with droopy trees like weeping willows.

"Come on," said James, "we'll get some water there." Lizzie changed course and waddled slowly over grass hummocks towards the verdant scene.

"We'll use our hats for filling with," said James.

As we approached the smooth little lake it seemed to develop golden shoals of sand. Then some lumpy rocks came to the surface! The water became evanescent. The trees of verdigris colour became transparent; the kopjes back of them could be seen too clearly, where they had been hidden before. Then all the water seeped away.

"Hades!" exclaimed James.

"Mirage!" quoth I.

And so it was.

We sacrificed the drinking-water from our canvas bag slung alongside Lizzie, and went on our course cautiously.

We saw many mirages in South-West after that day. A particularly interesting one was to be seen from the front stoep of a farmhouse on a hill south of Mariental. While week-ending with these friends once we got up early to see it; about 6 a.m., for it always appeared exactly at that time, when weather conditions were right. Further south, about five miles away, we knew that out of sight normally, for it was hidden by kopjes, there was a railway halt on the line from Mariental to Gibeon, the next station down the line. Yet early in the morning the halt would float high in the air above the kopjes for about three minutes. Then the tiny white building, a few yards of rail track and the two or three trees faded again, and you found yourself staring once more at sky and hills! Just for those few minutes each morning was the whole scene thrown upward by some freak of reflection.

The flat-topped kopjes which surrounded us as we motored along are a real feature of South Africa. The great plains of the Karroo are criss-crossed by ranges of hills, few of which finish in peaks like the hills of other lands. They are really lesser plateaux on top of the one vast plateau which is South Africa itself. It is as if a giant hand had, with a sharp knife, sliced off the tips of the hills, making them all the children of flat-topped old Table Mountain down at Cape Town. On one lower plateau we saw the remains of a German country club where the officers of the *Kaiser Wilhelm* were once wont to besport themselves, and on another flat-topped hill stood the bleak remains of a burnt-out police-station, attacked by the Herreros in the revolt of 1904. It is said no policeman escaped alive from that station.

The smooth pan ended in a horseshoe of limestone cliffs beneath which stood a red stone farmhouse. Here we turned right through some sand dunes, before setting Lizzie to groan a low tune in second gear up the steep, bumpy track which here mounted the Kalk. The farmhouse we by-passed was the only habitation

of any sort we had seen since leaving Mariental sixteen miles behind. Below the house we saw a fenced-in plot in which whitewashed tombstones stood out in the sand; it was a graveyard containing the graves of the Germans murdered here by the Herreros.

As Lizzie bounced over the last bump on to the crown of the Kalk plateau we suddenly saw a different country. Gone were the barren flats of the railway line, vanished the brak pebble-strewn pan we had come through. Instead, the road now wound over undulating veld of rich vegetation. Here were trees, bushes, and grasses to gladden the eyes and tickle the palates of our stock. The kameelboom was very graceful, with its branches flat-spread like a cedar's. The umbrella tree, or nuniboom, also grew everywhere, and, as its name indicates, offered excellent shade from the sun. Grasses, bushes, and ground plants were plentiful too: the hakie bush, the grey velvet-leaved gávè bush, brosdorn, skaapbush, gannabush, dotted the veld thickly. There were eight days' grass, bushman grass, vlei grass, sour grass which is so good when seeding for fattening stock, and miles of shimmering silver grass, glistening in the bright sun like a prairie of waving oats. Yellow-flowered opeslag, sama melons, and other ground plants flourished here too. All this vegetation conspired to give a park-like effect to the far-flung miles of rising and dipping veld stretching in waves to distant horizons. It had all recently enjoyed good rains, and the country was wholly delightful.

Incidentally the road changed, too, and no longer was our travelling smooth, as in the ten-mile pan. Here we alternately shot over limestone lumps and outcrops and pulled heavily through pockets of deep soft sand, or joggled along stretches of goffered surface, all most good for the liver. I've always thought that that last fourteen miles to our farm from Mariental must be the worst track in the world. And the soft sandy stretches of road were rendered no easier by the deep ruts ploughed by wagon wheels, which are a different gauge from the span of a car's wheels. So for ever more we cursed the wagons and they cursed us.

As we passed under a kameelboom outspread over a bend in the road, which we later dubbed Tattenham Corner, I looked up to see the sketchy remains of our late carver chair swinging forlornly above us. A few yards further on I forgot the derelict, thinking I was beginning to see things in another sense. Just beside the truck, standing knee deep in silver grass, there was a magnificent grey "horse". It had a long black tail and an exquisitely marked head surmounted by a pair of long, straight horns, beautifully turned like the legs of a Jacobean table. Those horns swept back majestically over the lovely creature's back.

"By Jove, that must be a gemsbok!" said James. I vaguely remembered the word as applied to one of the many buck in the Kruger National Park, the biggest game reserve in South Africa. And a gemsbok it really was, one of the many interesting species of wild creatures which roam the Kalahari and its borders in herds of hundreds. Here there were also springbok, stembok, Kalahari wolves, duiker, kudu, ostrich, wildebeeste, lion and leopard, jackals and other animals, most of which we were to see in the years that have followed. Indeed, less than a mile from our destination that day a little fawn-coated antelope, a stembok, jumped up from its sleep behind a bush and skipped away, till about fifty yards off curiosity prompted it to stop and gaze at us with its huge velvety eyes. Apparently we were to live right in the midst of all these creatures. And until the farms adjoining ours became occupied later, and the district grew, so that shooting parties invaded the veld, we became quite accustomed to seeing groups of ostrich mincing along in their absurd gait within a couple of hundred yards of our house, to watching stembok come to lick up the salt our sheep had left in their troughs, or to catching sight of springbok stealing in at dusk for a drink at our dam. For a long time one old fellow used to come regularly for his evening drink. We would see him, silhouetted against the sunset, waiting till the flocks of sheep had drunk and gone. Then

when all was quiet he would come in close to the house and drink. I used to hide in the garden to see him more closely. He was always alone, and he limped a little, so that his springing days were over. He was old, unwanted by his herd, and I wished we could tame him. But the springbok is the Spirit of Freedom, and so this one remained free and independent to the end; till the day when he came no more to drink at our dam each evening.

CHAPTER VIII

THE FIRST SIGHT OF OUR NEW HOME GAVE ME A SHOCK. IT WAS JUST A MUD-BRICK shack of three rooms, and looked as if the bad fairies had thrown it together overnight as a mischievous prank. However, it was to be only a temporary home. We intended to build a new house as soon as possible about two hundred yards away from this shack.

After my one preliminary visit I once more collected my kit, child, and cats, and drove out with James in a luggage-encrusted car to "Barenklau", our new farm. The name of the place is German, and means bear's claw, and we saw no reason to change it. Later, when my brother paid us a visit while on leave from India, he brought us a Himalayan bearskin, and we hung it spreadeagled above the front door of the new house we had built by that time, thus giving the farm's title a significance.

Here we were then, out in the back blocks, two hundred miles from the town of Windhoek, and over thirty miles from a dorp and the railway. On the farm we found, beside the shack, one artesian water-hole and windmill, and twenty-four baby citrus trees—oranges, lemons and naartjes or tangerines. We possessed just eight hundred Merino sheep, a few goats, including Liesel the Saanen, one cow, three cats, some hens, and Curly the dog. These and ourselves were planted down in the middle of 22,000 acres of untamed, unfenced veld, which held the courtesy title of a farm, though to the uninitiated it looked like nothing but a wilderness. But, at last, it was our own place! We had paid for it $\frac{1}{4}$ an acre—mostly on bond to the Government. And never for one moment from the beginning was life anything but a thrill; our natives, the animals, the climate, the work and all the funny things which kept happening conspired to keep us very much alive.

To start with, before we had time to settle in properly, we had to shear the sheep. They could not be left any longer, and anyway we needed some cash. It meant putting up some thorn-bush kraals and building in great haste a pole-and-mud shearing shed. From the first there had been frantic activity, and I landed into the middle of it. Led by James, Gladstone and Disraeli and some newly-hired boys herded the sheep to grazing, threw up the shearing shed, planted stout poles from which to hang the wool-sacks, and did innumerable other jobs.

The South African summer starts in October, and it is then that the wool-buyers from Europe want our clips. Therefore the fleeces must come off, and it is shearing-time on every merino farm. Eight hundred sheep were ready to be shorn on this farm. Ten stalwart native shearers, aided by farm shepherds, break off a clump of about two hundred sheep from the main flock and drive them, headed by half a dozen goats detailed as leaders, towards the wire-netting enclosure, or kraal, outside the shearing shed. Bewildered muft hamals (wool wethers) or flustered

ewes, as the case may be, try to give them the slip at every opportunity, but a ring of hallooing, hat-waving, energetic sons of Ham eventually succeeds in herding them all into the pen.

The mud-floored shearing shed measures thirty feet square, and one side is open. At the left-hand end of the shed, from a big structure of iron poles planted in the floor, four or more huge wool-sacks are suspended, each labelled and gaping ready to receive its particular class of wool. In the centre of the room stands the sorting table, which is a wooden framework with a wire-mesh top. To the right of this the shearers do their work.

Each hefty, half-nude native grabs a protesting sheep in the pen and hands it, struggling, into the shed. Each shearer picks up a pair of ready sharpened shears and sits his sheep on its tail end. And then amid gusts of laughter and much chatter—for these natives are merry simple souls—there starts the steady clip, clip, clip, of shearing. Stomach wool is first shorn off and placed by the baas in the bale marked "bellies". The dirty wool on the hind legs is quickly trimmed and left on the floor for the time being. Then round the neck, up the flanks and over the back travel the shears, so that the fleece comes off intact and whole. The baas, or one of the two or three neighbours who have ridden over from their own farms to help him, picks up the fluffy fleece, creamy with its natural oil, and flings it out flat on the sorting-table, while the shearer has a dried bean dropped into his palm. One sheep, one bean, and he will get 15/- for every hundred beans he can show at the end of the clipping.

Busy fingers then pick off the skirtings round the edges of the fleece and class the rest of the wool into "backs" and "fleece" of first and second quality. The dirt-laden, heavy "locks", still adhering, fall through the wire netting on to the floor, and are afterwards packed with the clippings from the hind legs. So each class of wool methodically finds its way into the respective bale awaiting it: first fleeces, second fleeces, backs, bellies, skirtings and locks being the main classings. As each bale is filling it is tramped, and the treaders' boots become beautifully soft and oiled by the grease from the wool. When filled the bale is sewn up with a packing-needle and stout twine and rolled away, while another is hung up to take its place.

Snip, snip, snip; laughter, talk and bustle inside the shed; scuffling, bleating, and dust in the pen without. Sheep after sheep, looking white and soft like a badly-peeled orange, is turned out of the shed. There goes a nice ram, whose fleece must weigh fifteen or twenty pounds. He must be glad to be rid of it in this weather!

Then midday arrives and the baas calls a half-hour's halt. The shorn sheep are sent off to graze with the main flock, the shearers repair to their crude camp to make and consume their coffee and mealie pap, and the baas and his neighbour helpers walk over to the homestead, where a meal awaits them.

At 12.30 another batch of sheep is caught out and penned, and the temporarily deserted shed is alive again with workers and animals. More victims are hustled in to be clipped. Sometimes there is a slip of the shears, and the baas must put a daub of disinfectant on the cut before turning the sheep loose. A shimmering haze hangs over the veld outside, and the afternoon heat in the shed is intense. There is very little laughter and talk now, for sweat trickles down the shiny ebony faces and the white men keep mopping their foreheads. Backs are aching with stooping over the sheep and leaning across the sorting table. Choking dust and a smell of sheep and toiling humanity fill the shearing shed. At last four o'clock comes, and tea-time makes a welcome break, though it gives the men only a few moments to pour a mug of refreshing hot liquid down their throats and no more.

Some sheep still remain in the pen, so the work continues till the glow of the sinking sun points to the end of a toilsome day. Then the last shorn sheep is

pushed out, and the shearers straighten their backs and count out their beans from their bandana handkerchiefs where they had stowed them. Piet there got through forty sheep, for he is quick and deft at his work. Hendriks, July, Music, Hans, Sixpence, Biscuit, April and Jacob are slower, and averaged thirty-two apiece; while Abraham, who is like a big, slow-moving bear, can produce only twenty-five beans, though, as his good-natured grin of flashing white teeth shows you, he is quite content. He has earned enough to buy tomorrow's coffee, mealie meal, goat-flesh and brown bread, so what more does a good nigger want! The total for the day is three hundred and twenty-one sheep. Not such quick work as the Australian shearing machines can do, but not so bad for hand-shearing. Tomorrow, when everyone is no longer so fresh, the total will be smaller, but we shall finish inside the week.

The shed is quiet, the sheep are kraaled, the day is done. Short sharp twilight gives place to starry night. The lights of the homestead prick out in the surrounding darkness. Hot baths (in tin tubs) are on tap. Supper follows, after which neighbours who have ridden over to help ride off with a cheery "good night", and promises of helping again tomorrow. At last we subside for a smoke and a chat, sitting on camp chairs under the stars, and watch the distant figures silhouetted around a big log fire, where shearers and shepherds are hobnobbing over their evening meal in the open. Sounds of merriment and singing, and the smell of fragrant hot coffee, float across the still night air; and the soft thrum-thrum of a native strumming rhythmically on his mandolin comes over the African night.

At last the bulging bales stood in a row, sewn up, labelled, and ready to be loaded on to the wagon. We were impatient to get them away because the wool market had already touched its highest point, and then dropped a penny. But the two natives hired and sent off to round up donkeys and drive the wagon had failed to return. They had taken French leave, and we had no redress. But at last we got the wool started on its way, the high-piled wagon, pulled by sixteen donkeys, groaning and lurching on its two-day trip along the track to the dorp and railway. The wagon track it took was six miles shorter than the usual road, but although passable to wagons it was far too sandy and heavy for Lizzie. So when James drove into the railway two days later, to weigh and dispatch the wool to brokers at the coast, he travelled by the longer road. The wagon should have arrived at the station by that time. But there was no wagon! Risking the sand, he travelled back along the wagon-track, to find at last, only five miles from home, that the entire outfit had stuck in the sand. It had not occurred to the drivers to off-load the bales, extricate the wagon, reload, and push on. Oh no! They had outspanned the donkeys, hobbled them, and let them stray off to graze, and had comfortably camped themselves to await help, which they knew must come sooner or later. It did not matter to them that time passed, while wool prices dropped. They had enough for the day, so what mattered tomorrow? Time means very little in Africa! Meanwhile for us, as in Alice in Wonderland, there was jam yesterday, jam tomorrow (perhaps), but no jam today.

After this experience of native unreliability we vowed we would always sell our wool on the farm. At times when wool prices are reasonably good, store-keepers, speculators, and brokers' agents generally tour the farms at clipping-time and offer to buy. Some farmers are inclined to look on these buyers with suspicion as sharks, but we have always got a fair enough deal from them. Dealing directly with them gives you the advantage of being able to haggle with your man on the spot, whereas if you rail your wool to a broker at the coast you are entirely at the mercy of the distant firm. Most wool firms vow solemnly that they are commission agents only, but you are at any rate free to suspect them of being buyers as well, so you may not get the price for which your wool was really sold at the auctions. James learnt this lesson once and for all on the one occasion later

when he broke his vow to sell nowhere but on the farm. A touring buyer had offered him 1/- a lb. on the spot, which meant we would be free of all expenses for transport, railage, storage, and commission, and the price seemed to me a good one. Unfortunately, I said so, and the baas turned obstinate and held out for another 2d. a lb. He was refused it, and declared he would send the clip to the coast. He did so, and got just 10d. a lb. minus expenses, which reduced his net profit to about 8d. a lb.!

The lesson from this is, keep your eye on the market, and accept any reasonable offer. Never mind if another fellow gets a little more; prices change almost from hour to hour during the buying times. You will probably get more than he does next time. The best way to raise your prices is by steadily improving your produce, whatever this may be, and not by arguing with the buyers, who, after all, know their markets back to front, and are far from being all swindlers. A small, quick, sure turnover is what Woolworth's built their fortune on!

The first wool-buyer who visited us gave me a bit of a shock when I was still ignorant to wool classings. Naturally he wanted to see what he was buying. One or two of the fleece bales were slit, so that he could thrust in his hand, to feel and see the wool's quality. Then he absently glared at us, and startlingly said, "And now let's see your bellies!"

Right in the middle of shearing that very first time on Barenklau we got a surprise which taxed all my humble powers as hostess. A friend from Britstown, to whom we had given a standing invitation to look us up if ever in South-West, took us at our word and arrived without warning, as is the way in this hospitable country, just when we had no spare bedroom at all. Happily there is rarely such a circumstance as "weather permitting" in this country; except during the rains it is always fine. So we put up a stretcher for our guest outside the shack, where James kept him company. In the mornings the two came in and shaved on a window-sill, while I cooked breakfast and chatted to them. Who cared for the conventions? Also, during this week, if anyone, not content with a cold sluice down by the dam, wanted a hot bath, they had it in the secluded corner by the kitchen stove, while the rest of us went for a walk. That was a comical week, and our guest, who had come here hankering to buy a farm and live the simple life, got just what he had asked for! I do believe he was glad that he had not arrived at a more propitious time.

The most intensely busy time, while it lasts, on a merino farm is, of course, shearing-time, and also the lesser clipping of the lambs' wool in March or April. For the rest of the year, however, the wool farmer has plenty to do all the same. Lambing means a lot of work, the boys need constant supervision, windmills need oiling, fences need repairing, perhaps a new dam must be constructed, and the gardens at the homestead and the outlying camps require everlasting hard work and attention.

There is a good story of a farmer who felt that supervising his boys took up too much of his time: he felt he could be better employed, perhaps, irrigating his lands. Yet he had at that time a particularly easy-going shift of boys working on the scraping of a new earth dam. To save himself standing over them all day long, he had an idea. Placing a new shiny tobacco-tin, stripped of its paper wrapping, on a prominent rock, he told the boys: "That is my Ju-ju, my watching eye, which will see if you work or not while I am away from you. If you idle, I shall know. The Ju-ju will report truly to me."

The boys looked at the tobacco-tin. It winked knowingly in the bright sunshine. There was a murmur among them.

"Good," thought the farmer. "I've impressed them properly," and walked away.

When he had gone about a hundred yards some thought made him turn and

take a last look at the boys. One or two had started work again but the rest were watching one of their number, who had also had an idea every bit as good as that of the baas. This boy was crawling carefully forward towards the rock on which stood the Ju-ju. He held his old felt hat in one hand. Cautiously he approached the Ju-ju. Then with a final determined rush he clapped the hat over the tobacco-tin. A sigh of relief swept through the group of boys. The Ju-ju was blinded and *hors de combat*, the baas had apparently gone, so surely they could now sit on their hunkers, smoke and chat in this heat for a while.

A good farmer must get up early in the mornings the world over. The merino man always sees to it that his flocks are away grazing in the cool of the morning. So James's first duty lay in the kraals. The hansie lambs—the little orphans—had to be fed, either on goats or on bottles, or unwilling ewes tied 'up by the leg. When milk goats were scarce I used to prepare the bottles of warm milk myself for the hansis, and give them to James to take across to the kraals. The weaker babies were sometimes given a beaten egg in their warm milk, for this is a marvellous tonic for a sickly lambkin. After all this breakfasting the flocks had to be looked over for their health's sake. If a sheep is seen to be scratching itself the baas points it out to a shepherd, who promptly catches it by the hind leg and brings it, protesting and kicking, for inspection. He parts the wool at the spot scratched and the baas peers at the skin revealed. Often it is nothing but an irritating thorn caught in the thick wool; sometimes it is boss lice, but of course it may prove to be scab or some other dreaded disease, entailing the expense and worry of dipping every sheep on the farm. In rainy weather in grass country, a lookout must also be kept against blue-tongue, a fever which can be staved off by early injections of preventive serum, or by doses of quinine.

After this morning inspection the sheep go off to graze with the shepherds. The ewes and lambs, or ewes in lamb, need particularly careful herding, as they cannot travel so fast or so far as the hamals, or other ewes alone.

We had cemented the floors of our shack, as we later intended to use the building as a store and garage. We did not then know of the various home-made floors, one or other of which we might have laid ourselves. The simplest plan would have been to collect several wagon-loads of pan clay—a smooth cement-like clay found in the bottom of veld depressions in some districts—and to lay this mud to a depth of three or four inches all over the sand floor, marking it into checks just as a cement floor is marked, in order to ensure its contracting evenly, and not in unsightly zig-zag cracks. Even left like this, we should have had a firm level surface, though the proper finishing touch consists of liberally smearing the whole surface with fresh warm ox or sheep's blood and, when dry, rubbing it over with a good wax polish. The first time I saw such a floor I was charmed and puzzled at the deep-red, shiny surface, so like a good granolithic floor. If a black floor is wanted, then the clay surface is painted with Stockholm tar before being polished.

Another well-known South African floor is the paper floor. For this you must collect a veritable mountain of paper of all sorts. Next boil this paper in the biggest vessels you can lay hands on. When the stuff is thoroughly pulped it is applied to the earth floor to a depth of several inches—the deeper the better—stamping it down evenly as you work. When quite dry apply either paint, enamel, or stain and polish. The result, if well done, is amazingly good. If bad, however, it looks particularly bad! But, after all, cement floors can be swept out so easily, and occasionally sluiced over with disinfectant and water, which is cooling in the hot weather. If found cold during the winter they can always be covered with China, or coconut, matting, superimposed by rugs and mats. We found ours looked very nice like this, and were content with them.

While James farmed through these first days on Barenklau, I cooked, sewed, cleaned, washed and ironed, and worked domestically with the help of a haughty

Herrero dame. This lady was very trying. She was very haughty indeed, moving with the slow stateliness of all Herrero women, and if ever it was suggested that she should hustle, she would promptly subside on to her hunkers, light her tin pipe, and protest about everything in life in a shrill cataract of tongue-clicks. I think it was as well I did not understand her picturesque speech!

I believe it was solely because of the local domestic difficulty in this region that a young Boer we knew suddenly decided to get married. When he announced his intention to me, I asked the lady's name.

"Oh, I'm not sure yet," he replied casually. Then, seeing my surprise, he added: "You see, a man can't live alone on a farm here and keep decent and fit without a woman to mend and sew for him, and cook proper food. So I'm going to marry."

I was not horrified. I felt his offer was scrupulously fair. In return for the services mentioned he offered a girl permanent board and lodging, the protection of his good name, clothes and money (if markets were good), and all the privileges of wifehood and motherhood. I confess I liked the frankness and sanity of his outlook, especially as he was more than likely to have the sense to choose a girl well suited and reared to life on the veld. Not often does a Boer fall a victim to the folly we call love: he believes staunchly in the *mariage de convenance*, and, to translate "*Dieu et mon Droit*" in the manner of the howler-committing schoolboy, I would say, "My God, he's right!"

Another young Boer here was amusing in his attitude towards his approaching marriage. He had called over at Barenklau one day to borrow three or four pairs of shears: the wool market had reached its peak and he was in a great hurry to shear his sheep and despatch his clip before prices started on the down grade. As our own shearing was finished we spared him all our shears and offered other help. Then over the usual cup of tea I spoke of his wedding, dated for the beginning of the following week, and was flabbergasted to hear this canny bridegroom say:

"I'm not sure that I'll be able to go into the dorp for the wedding that day after all!"

"But how can you do otherwise?" I gasped.

"I'll perhaps not have finished my shearing," he explained. He was so calm about it. Well, he is safely married today, so presumably he found time to attend his own wedding after all.

More canny than any Scot was this young man. His sheep and goats, and more particularly the proceeds therefrom, ranked higher in his stolid mind than birth, death, and marriage.

Just at first we had no kitchen stove and managed our cooking on a couple of primus stoves. My baking of bread I did in an ant-heap. In many districts the armies of ants on the veld throw up solid, conical heaps of earth, six or eight feet in height, and one of these, hollowed out, makes an excellent oven. A big wood fire is kindled inside the hole, and when the flames have died down the temperature in the ant-hill is tested with a piece of paper on a stick. If the paper turns brown and burns immediately the temperature is right. The cinders are then raked out and the prepared loaves, cakes, or joint of meat are put in. The opening is sealed up with a sheet of tin plastered into place with mud. At the end of an hour the baking should be finished. My first ant-heap loaves would have been a great success if only the roof of the ant-hill had not partially fallen in. That batch of bread was rather like the curate's egg: good in parts. The loaves were beautifully baked, but were a bit gritty!

In addition to the domestic work which the Herrero girl and I did between us there were many other jobs. There were baby chicks to be looked after (for we had

an incubator now), the dog, cats, and hens must be fed, and Liesel carefully nourished on ample greenstuffs and her concentrated rations of oats, bran, mealie meal, and linseed cake. And of course there were the child's foods and rusks to make. Sometimes it seemed as if the lot would wax hungry together and lift up their voices in rowdy musical comedy. And in the middle of the chorus James would return from a shooting tramp across the veld and say, "What about dinner?"

Liesel was our main milk supply at this time. The cow was a born wanderer and not to be relied upon. So we gave Liesel much attention. In addition to her own foods she loved bread, and had a perfect passion for a slice spread with black treacle. In her ecstatic gratitude, coupled with a demand for more, at being given this titbit she would stand on her hind legs and plant her front hooves on my chest, nearly knocking me down. We got the black treacle direct from a Natal sugar plantation. It came in a four-gallon petrol tin (a "blik"), at 1/- a tin. Once the tin arrived at Mariental station with a neat hole punched either side of the top. It was quite empty! Someone between Natal and South-West liked treacle as well as Liesel. Treacle is, of course, excellent for any milk animal. We generally mixed it into her concentrated feed.

I do not think that even now, when the people of Britain know so much more about dietetics than before 1939, they appreciate goat's milk as the South African does. *For children and babies it is even better than cow's milk, owing to its greater digestibility.* The reasons for this are the extra albumin; the minute casein molecules, permitting their easy digestion; the thinness of the walls of the fat capsules, allowing of quick action of the gastric juices on these walls; and the fact that the fat in goat's milk is the mildest and most easily assimilated fat known.

Also goat's milk is practically free from all danger of tuberculosis, of which we stand in such fear from the milk of cows. Nor need Malta fever be feared from the milk of pure-bred Swiss nannies, though on medical advice we always boiled the milk taken from cross-bred animals, so as to avoid all risk. And, contrary to popular ideas, the milk is not strong flavoured if the males are kept away from the nannies supplying milk to the house.

Too many people, in crass ignorance, exclaim, "Goats! Ugh! They smell!" and leave it at that. A properly kept and correctly fed nanny goat never smells. Admittedly a billy's odour would down a skyscraper, but you do not *have* to keep a male at all. You can safely leave the keeping of billies to recognized and expert breeders, and hire the services of an animal when required. But the nannies make charming and docile pets, as well as being in truth a perfect "poor man's cow".

Liesel had decided that she would be towards us something more than a mere milk-producer. From first to last she was a real pal, especially towards James! (This stung a bit, for it was I who fed her, while the baas milked her, and took that which she had to give!) For him she had a deep affection, chiefly evidenced by following him round like a dog at every opportunity.

The first time James went shooting on Barenklau to get an ostrich for the shepherds he got his bead on a likely bird about three miles from home. He was just about to fire when there was a loud, prolonged bleat at his elbow. Liesel had followed him unnoticed, and had gone shooting too. Her voice saved the life of that ostrich. When she had repeated this act on several occasions James used to tie her up before setting out, and leave instructions that she be loosed an hour or so later. Poor Liesel! How she chafed, watching her baas till he was out of sight! After suffering this treatment a few times, she decided to outwit us. When let off she went in search of James, and found him lost on the veld, walking in a circle, as he realized afterwards, with its circumference a good four miles from home! Was he glad to see Liesel that time! After that he once more let

her do as she pleased (which was her intention all through), and in time trained her to keep quiet until after he had got his game—if shooting were the object of their walk.

A surprise visitation from strangers, two young commercial travellers, caused an amusing incident at this time. They rolled up in a closed sedan car, and while having supper with us they had foolishly left the doors of the car open. The result was that half a dozen of our Minorca fowls spent a delightfully cosy night in the car!

Mention of fowls is a reminder of another amusing incident. Finding that, although poultry would not pay as a commercial proposition on an outlandish farm like Barenklau, we needed more birds for our own egg supply immediately, we sent away for two dozen more Minorcas. These travelled from a breeder in the distant Orange Free State, and James fetched them out from Mariental station in Lizzie. When he arrived home in the evening he released the birds in front of the newly erected tin shanty which was to house them and then, forgetting them, entered the shack.

I was too busy with the evening chores, and my son's bath and supper, to run out and inspect the new arrivals, and after their preliminary cluckings had died down I too forgot the birds until about an hour later, when I carried my bathed and suppered son into his cot in the room which he and I shared. The sun had gone down and it was now dusk, so that when I entered the bedroom I only dimly saw that the white wood rail of the child's cot seemed to have developed strange black lumps and bumps. A candle revealed the truth. The two dozen newly arrived hens had scorned their tin hut, and had flown through the window, or more probably walked straight through the french door which led down two steps on to the veld, and had perched all round the cot. Great and noisy was their indignation when we shooed them out of the house.

A casual visitor at this time proved to be a veritable Mrs. Malaprop, masculine edition. With his rifle in the crook of his arm he strolled in off the veld one morning, clad in khaki drill and a battered terai hat. Having introduced himself as a Government well-driller from the Kalahari, he settled down to spend the day with us. He told us of his work, managing one of the big steam-driven drilling machines which bored for water on the Kalahari farms, so that the borders of the great desert might be tamed and made to produce food. He told us too of his shooting expeditions, and of his camp life with the other drillers.

"I suppose you live in tents?" I asked him.

"Yes, we're always under canvas," he replied.

"How do you manage to keep food fresh in the summer out there in tents, and in such sandy country?" I went on.

"Oh, we've got an impoverished cooler," was his startling information.

Everyone in this country has a food-cooler of some kind, whether improvised at home or otherwise. The fortunate few in the cities have electric refrigerators or ice chests, but the vast majority of dwellers in this land possess the "impoverished" cooler mentioned by our driller friend. Our own was made by James, and is a large cupboard with a double skeleton frame of stout wood, on the outer frame of which is stretched fine meshed wire netting, while the inner wall is of perforated zinc. Between the wire netting and the zinc, the space of about three inches, is filled with charcoal, or even cinders (bought from the railway at 1/- a sack). The charcoal is kept constantly wet from above by means of large tins of water standing on the roof of the cooler, from which the moisture is conducted down to the charcoal by soaked strips of flannel and sacking. The cooler stands on the shaded stoep, and when the wind (which in South Africa is nearly always there) blows through the wetted charcoal the food on the shelves within the cooler becomes

delightfully chilled even on the hottest midsummer day when the thermometer is soaring to 115° in the shade and the desert winds feel like a furnace blast.

The more affluent build double-walled coolers of openly spaced cement brick, filled in with charcoal wetted by means of pipes and taps, but although these little "ice houses" are more spacious and less Heath Robinsonish-looking than the wood-and-wire cupboards of humbler folk, they are no more efficacious in cooling food. Their one real advantage is that they are more fly-proof. No hotel, bar, butchery, or restaurant could possibly be run in this country without some such chilling arrangement for drinks, meat, and all fresh foodstuffs. It is even wise to keep all tinned stores (especially tinned salmon) in the cooler too when the weather is very hot.

Besides the improvised cooler, our driller friend's other Malapropisms gave us cause for much mirth after his departure. He had called me "irreverent" when he meant irrelevant, and had also described how his native boys had yelled with "incitement" when a lion had broken into their thorn-bush encampment one night. Also when James, in talking of shooting, had remarked that one could not tackle a leopard carelessly with impunity, he had replied:

"No, I always tackle 'em with a '303."

A few months after we had settled into our shack two young Boers with a small herd of cattle and some sheep bought a farm near by. While their bore-hole was being drilled, and their homestead built, they camped on Barenklau, and, in return for the grazing we gave for their animals, presented us with a bucket of milk daily. Many payments here are made thus, in kind instead of cash. The milk was a godsend then, as Liesel the faithful was shortly due to kid, and could no longer be milked, of course. Also it was a blessing to have two cheerful companions about the place daily.

It was while these two men were with us that the Administrator of South-West Africa toured our district. We were notified of his coming by our local magistrate, and asked if we could give the Government House party eleven-ses on a certain date. Among other refreshments, I was able to make for the occasion some delicious meringues filled with quantities of cream from that rich bucket of milk. (As a rule we churned it into butter by shaking vigorously in an oatmeal tin.) The meringues caused much merriment, as our visitors were highly amused at getting such confections on the backveld. Two years later, when James had cause to visit Government House in Windhoek, the Administrator asked him if we still lived on meringues!

Five minutes after the two cars full of officials had driven off, a cross-eyed hobo, who cannot have been washed since the last rains fell six months before, and draped in ragged khaki drill, slouched into our shack with the assurance of a king, and then blinked dazedly at the remains of the meringues and other dainties. Naturally we sat him down, made fresh tea, and regaled him. I had planned to give myself a day off from more cooking, and to make my family and the two young Boers finish the residue of the eleven-ses for dinner and supper, but alas, the hobo wolfed the Lucullan feast faster than a Spitfire can fly, and we four amused ourselves by egging him to it, for he was obviously very hungry, poor soul. This was an epicure's paradise to his mind, and sensibly, he wallowed in it. I think he thought us crazy, but he planted himself on us for two days before he departed on his way.

With May and June the cold weather had arrived. Africa does nothing by halves, and when she has finished treating you to a long blazing summer she will, after the shortest autumnal pause, often hand out a bitter winter. In fact we often spoke of the seasons as "Sandstorms, Summer, The Rains, and Winter". In Mariental we never had snow, of course, and we rarely saw hail, but the biting winds which daily drove across the leagues of open veld from the south-east had all the iciness of the South Pole in their ferocity. They came straight off the

ice itself. Down in Cape Town this south-easter is familiarly known as the Cape Doctor, for although it may leave a few head-colds in its wake, it seems to blow all sickness out of the city every year. We wished devoutly we had a fireplace in the shack. The new house should have one in every room! But now the wind whistled in through the many apertures and openings of the dreadfully ramshackle little building, and found us crouching over the kitchen range for warmth. Whereas in the excessive heat of January I had poured with perspiration when ironing our weekly wash beside the wood-burning stove which heated my flatirons, I was now grateful for the warmth of the job. Then I had worked in a minimum of cotton clothing, with a bath-towel to stand on and another handy to mop my dripping face, neck, and hands; now, in June, I wore a woollen frock, and liked the cosy grip of my palm on the irons.

That was a particularly cold winter. The nights were icy. But the days were always bright and sunny and clear. It was ideal, heavenly weather for riding. There is always the sunshine in Africa.

.

The merino farmer sees to it that lambing each year is early, so that lambs may be well grown and strong before the next hot weather arrives, and so that the ewes in rearing their lambs may have the full benefit of early summer herbage, prompted to growth by the rains which wet the veld the previous autumn. But this year the winter was a long one, and consequently the earliest lambs received an extra cold welcome into this world. Before daybreak every morning James, muffled in a fleece-lined trench-coat, visited the kraals, and returned to our shack with armfuls of half-stiff lambkins, new-born during the night, and now nearly frozen to death, and handed them over to my care.

I had turned James out of his bedroom and emptied it completely, and in there I used to lay the frozen woolly babies in rows on sacks, each with an old glass bottle of some sort filled with hot water, tucked up close against him, and covered with old blankets and more sacks. For an hour or so there would be complete silence, and then, starting with an odd bleat or two, there would arise a shrill chorus of ma-a-ing as the revived and cosy infants came back to life. When at length we opened the door we would see tossed masses of "bedding" on the floor, reminiscent of a barrack room just after the soldiers had sprung up and out at the sound of the alarm bugle. Then a dozen or two of frisky lambs would wobble and gambol past us into our living-room. When we hastily drove them out of there on to the veld, their bleating would crescendo to operatic strength as each was claimed by an anxiously waiting ewe. Then each happy lamb would dither off on shaky legs in the wake of its ponderous mamma. It remained for me to clear up their late nursery, and fold up the sacks and bits of blanket for the next morning's batch.

Lambing brings many troubles. Often a young ewe with a first lamb, who knows nothing about this motherhood business, will refuse utterly to have anything to do with her offspring. If gentle persuasion fails, there is nothing left to do but rear the poor orphan on a goat foster-mother, or even feed it with a bottle. We had many troublesome young ewes that season, so soon had a collection of little hansis. When our son's Allenbury feeders got broken, we substituted Worcester sauce bottles fitted with teats, and these answered the purpose very well.

Liesel, the Saanen, kidded at this time, and gave us triplets: the three daintiest white animals imaginable, just like herself. In addition to rearing these, the wonderful creature also adopted a merino hansie, and successfully fed the whole quartet. It was comical to see her proudly strutting about the place with her mixed family, who soon became as tame and friendly as Liesel herself. Too tame, in fact. Our front door had a weak latch, and the goatlings soon discovered they

could butt open the door and have a wonderful time indoors if my back were turned. Liesel's passion for bread thus had full scope on one occasion when we had gone for a short evening spin in Lizzie. We returned to find that the family of five had butted their way into the shack, where mamma had shown her offspring a good thing in a loaf of bread I had foolishly left on the table.

"Crumbs!" exclaimed James aptly, as he turned the whole clan out.

One day Liesel upset me very much. Literally. She was fond of lying just under the high step from the ground up to the front door, and we had become quite accustomed to stepping over her when going in and out. Even our small boy clambered fearlessly across her. I approached with a bowl of eggs in my hand, and it was just when I was stepping over the recumbent goat that the creature chose to rise up and walk off with myself astride her broad back. Had I faced forward, all might have been well, but I faced her stern! My shriek of dismay startled our gentle friend, and she broke into a trot. I grabbed her tail. She wiggled the tail, and I came off with a crash of scrambled eggs.

Once my son collected the eggs unknown to me, and having tripped over Liesel below the doorstep, arrived prone on the kitchen floor with half a dozen eggs-that-had-been clasped to his blue-rompered front. When lifted to his feet, there was much omelet on his person, though he still persisted in calling them "yeggs".

Such were our first months on Barenklau. We were mighty poor then, but after all it is well known that those who have the least have the most, for they have everything before them. We certainly had some more good laughs ahead of us, anyway, even if the future promised no more.

Our one real hardship during this period was a lack of reading matter. Our little dorp boasted no library, so we had to read our own small stock of books through and through. Tiring of this, we next begged, borrowed, and exchanged books with our widely-scattered neighbours, until very soon we seemed to have read everything available in the district. Our post brought us papers and periodicals from England, and how we fell upon them and devoured them, weeks old though they were when they reached us! Then, realizing the supply was again running short, we would ration our reading until another batch of mail could be expected.

This lack of food for the mind does not generally worry the simple Boer of the backveld. He gossips, "kawfee"-drinks, and works among his sheep and goats through the day, and when evening comes he sups, reads a chapter of the Bible, kicks off his veldschoen, and rolls into bed.

If each of all those good people in England, looking for a good work to perform, were to discover the name of one lonely settler in southern Africa, and make him a present of a life subscription to a good magazine, great would be the rejoicing among many of the backveld's isolated farms. As a matter of fact, thanks to the kindly thoughtfulness and mediation of the Bishop of Damaraland at that time, whom we had the pleasure of meeting, many settlers have benefited in this way. To our own friends in England I have always felt the greatest gratitude for the post-bags heavy with books, papers, and magazines which they have sent steadily through the years. Indeed, since the tale of our mental starvation first filtered back across the seas we have often been chaffed by local friends about our mail. The post-office gave up trying to sort our post into a pigeon-hole under our initial along with all others of the same letter, and allotted us a special large packing-case labelled "Barenklau". Then when James and I would stagger out of the post-kantoor with rolls and parcels under each arm, and heavy canvas bags of mail dangling from our wrists, people meeting us would facetiously ask, "You're not moving house, are you?" or "Whither away with the family washing?"

No post was delivered thirty miles out at Barenklau. We had to drive in for

it, or send a boy to fetch it, whenever our patience and our reading matter gave out. The most joyous trip of the year, of course, was always the one we made on Christmas Eve. On these occasions Lizzie groaned home over the thirty miles of bumpy bush track laden with a mountainous mail in sacks: Cape wines, Christmas stores, presents for our hands, and sometimes a load of merry passengers from amongst dorp friends, to spend the next day with us. Once Lizzie's springs jibbed, and we had to off-load the truck on the side of the road and crawl carefully back about twelve miles to town for new leaves and repairs. On another occasion we shot an ostrich en route, and added its 200-lb. weight to the already heavy load, actually with impunity. But so little room was there for this addition that the great bird bounced off, and had to be reloaded twice on to its insecure perch atop all the other impedimenta on top of the lorry before we managed to get it home.

Knowing our craze for our mail and reading matter, anyone coming our way always brought the most recent accumulation along for us. Once our friend the doctor, knowing he must take our road while returning from a night case, turned up at Barenklau at 2 a.m. with a sack of mail for us. Joyfully we got up, made tea and sandwiches, and fell gratefully upon the doctor and the mail. At dawn we all had breakfast amid a litter of wrappings and envelopes. Life was certainly never dull at Barenklau. By day or by night some excitement was always assailing us.

CHAPTER IX

I HAVE MENTIONED THAT WE INTENDED TO BUILD A NEW HOUSE. WE STARTED IT soon after that first hectic shearing, and when all important preliminary jobs about the place were got in hand and under control. A Cape-coloured man, employing Herreros and Hottentots, contracted to erect our new abode, and the chief characteristic of this group of people was comparable to the tortoise, without any of that estimable creature's sureness. Time meant absolutely nothing to them, and they kept us waiting fifteen months for our house, a bungalow of four large rooms which in Europe could have been run up satisfactorily in a few weeks. And then two of the stoep pillars collapsed in the rains following the builders' departure! Mercifully no one stood on the front steps at the moment of the downfall.

All through the building, in reply to our exhortations to hustle, these charming people had two lovely mottoes. One was *More is nog'n dag*, meaning "Tomorrow is another day"; the other, *Alles sal reg kom*, which was "All shall come right." To us it meant that they never did today anything they could possibly put off until tomorrow, and also that everything was in a mess.

We planned this building ourselves, but to make sure that all would be well, we sent away to have a proper blueprint made. Unfortunately none of us understood the thing when it arrived. But we knew that we wanted large rooms not less than twenty feet in length, and fifteen-foot ceilings, and a few other details of that sort, and since we knew very definitely what we required of ourselves, we saw no reason to hesitate about a beginning.

So one morning the foundations were stepped out, with long strides, while everyone jabbered with excitement. When the actual building began the boys worked in spurts occasionally and laughed and talked around the site for the rest

of the time, unless supervised. During one unwatched spurt they took the design into their own hands, and built a deep and unnecessary alcove into the spare bedroom, which knocked many feet off the long-suffering bathroom. We tore it all down and started again. It seems impossible to get a proper bathroom on the backveld, and so tragic does this seem to the tub-mad English that mention of it this once more must be forgiven.

But this was not the first trouble by any means. When the bricks for the house had been moulded the contractor stacked the whole 40,000 in one big, unwieldy kiln.

"That erection looks top-heavy," I said to James one evening just before the kiln was fired, when the wagon was still fetching loads of wood and mis for the burning.

"Oh, I don't think so," James replied, though there was just a little doubt in his voice. James insists on being an optimist at all times.

Early next morning when we opened the shack door and looked across the veld we saw all that remained of the brick-kiln. Forty thousand bricks lay in a broken heap!

Many days passed in clearing up the mess, picking out whole bricks and discarding the broken ones. Then more were moulded to make up the number again. This time they were stacked for burning in two kilns.

"Tomorrow we will fire them, baas," said the contractor.

"Ja, I hope so," said James. One can always hope.

"It looks cloudy tonight," I remarked irrelevantly.

But it turned out to be a very pertinent remark. With all the merciless unexpectedness and suddenness with which such things occur in Africa, our small summer rains overtook us that night, weeks early. Generally these rains are no more than a few thunder-showers; this year they fell heavily. Our bricks were washed away in the downpour, and the dripping morn revealed two humped mounds of mud which but last evening had been bricks.

Was our new home to be nothing but a castle in the air for evermore?

For the third time the work was put in hand and a fresh lot of bricks made. This time they were successfully fired. Having toilsomely made the bricks, we discovered some lovely grey stone on the place. Almost did we discard the hard-won bricks, but realized that it would be quicker and cheaper to use them than to spend many moons dressing stone for a stone house, though this would have been delightfully cool in the hot weather. In the end we used the grey stone for the plinth of the bungalow, and the bricks, plastered with lime, for the walls.

The new house was put up just outside the thorn-bush barricade which protected—more or less only, as marauding goats had proved—the garden on its fourth side, so that when the building was finished this could be removed and proper fencing continued around the house to include it in the garden. This plan would give us an open view of the veld to the left and in front, and on the right a pleasant vista of evergreen orange trees, leaving the dam and windmill at the back.

When the walls of the house were started we sent the donkey-wagon into the dorp to the store-keeper from whom we had ordered materials, with a written request for the windows and door-frames. The good man promptly sent out the tin for the roof! This meant a long wait, for the walls could go no higher until the frames for doors and windows had been built in. The builders spent the empty days in putting up a little hut for themselves, for since the job of building our house promised to be an eternal one they had tired of camping under thorn bushes, exposed to rain and sun. Then, since the wagon, despatched again to fetch the frames, still tarried, Satan found mischief for their idle hands. The contractor stood firm, but his hirelings, tiring of farm existence, ran away but a few hours before the returning wagon hove in sight. More delay. James had to drive into

the dorp to beg a special police patrol of the sergeant so that our builders might be rounded up. With petrol at 3/3 a gallon, each trip cost us fifteen shillings or so in petrol, oil, and wear and tear, but thanks to the sergeant's kindly indulgence we had the builders back on Barenklau a week later, and the door- and window-frames were built into their places.

History repeated itself. When we sent the wagon in for the roof timber the store-keeper sent it back piled high with flooring board. Again more delay, and once again the bored builders departed on pleasure. This time James got so incensed he said, "Let 'em go," and, lifting the Cape-coloured gentleman, who had so little control over his employees, into the Lizzie, he drove again to the police sergeant and offered to bail out any prisoners in the local gaol who had any idea or inkling of how to hold a builder's trowel and slap mud on to bricks. The sergeant was quite agreeable, but the prisoners were not! Leave "tronk", where one gets free living and a soft time, to go out and *work*! "No fear!" said the prisoners, in effect.

To the mind of the uneducated African native there is no shame attached to being gaoled. Very often it is easier to procure inmates for a prison than to persuade them to leave again. A nice gaolhouse with a tin roof is better than a pontok with scorpion-infested grass thatch, and the white man's food is grand stuff. No wonder that when his time is up a prisoner has often to be forcibly ejected from prison!

There was nothing for it, then, but to ask the favour of another special patrol to round up our builders again. The sergeant said we ought to charge them with desertion and get them gaoled.

"Not likely!" said James. "Who do you think will build my house if we do that?" So once more the police found our builders, and our lagging house proceeded to rise with time and lethargy, with delays, of course, for carting fuel and for collecting kalk and burning it into lime.

Having spent £450 and fifteen months, we had our house at last. In the end James helped the builders to the extent of putting on the roof himself, hanging the doors, and laying most of the flooring. There remained only the final frills and decorations to be done.

This last we did ourselves, as it would have been an additional expense of £75 or so to induce European painters and decorators out from the dorp. So, enveloped in overalls, we spent many hours slapping whitewash and distempers on to the walls, and performing the acrobatic task of painting the wooden ceilings fifteen feet above the floor. One day our small boy "helped". Suspiciously quiet as ever when thoroughly happy, we ran him to earth in the newly-distempred living-room, busily engaged with a large flat brush in applying linseed oil to his person and to the pristine freshness of cream walls. That ineradicable oil-mark, despite all efforts to remove it, remains to this day, discreetly hidden by a chair-back.

When the puttying, painting, staining, and polishing were done, we started to create some furniture. The alternative was to get the real stuff from Cape Town, nine hundred miles away, and have it railed up at some expense. And although we had sheared again and received a good price for the wool, as well as a good cheque for two hundred full-mouth culls sold as mutton, it seemed wiser and less ruinous to have home made furniture along with all South Africa's other farmers. Charming rooms can be evolved from deal, packing-cases, plywoods, cretonnes, and paints, stains, and polishes. With the exception of the few articles brought with us from the Karroo, our furniture to this day is made with these materials, and we are very proud of it. What is the use of falling a victim to the hire-purchase merchant's blandishments simply in order to have a chesterfield suite that is nicer than Mrs. Smith's? It is much better to put the money into sheep and goats!

The day we moved into the new house was a red-letter day. We had said good-bye for ever to the shack with its pock-marked walls of mud brick, which no amount of curtains or other furnishings could camouflage. The new house was freshly curtained and cushioned throughout, for my sewing-machine had whirled for weeks before we moved in. The floors gleamed like dark water around the colourful islands that were our Persian rugs. Joyfully we dived into packing-cases and dug out brasses, blue china, pictures, books, silver, and pretty linens and damasks. To and fro between the new house and the old shack we trudged through the sand like laden mules, carrying boxes or their contents, till all was cut and dried and fixed into place.

There had been one problem of building which had not troubled us much when building this farmhouse. That was plumbing. This, as always on the veld, was simply disposed of in a hut in a far corner of the garden under the shade of a nuniboom. We did, however, lay water on to the house from the reservoir, doing the job entirely ourselves. We also fixed up a good shower in the bathroom. As the last few feet of piping climbed up a sun-smitten wall, the first gush of water from the shower was always very hot. In the colder weather we scrambled to be first under the shower, and in the summer politely hung back to be last!

As the house stood on a slight rise, our boys told us that the water would never run uphill for us. They gathered round to watch the first tap being turned, and chattered and laughed with amazement when the water really and truly gushed out!

We thought the early summer sandstorms were over when James decided to paint the corrugated-iron roof of our house a nice red. But capricious Nature still had one last kick left against us. Before the paint was dry, tons of best Kalahari grit swept past our house, enveloped it for hours, and left the red roof a dirty brick colour! The only thing was a blow-lamp, some more gallons of red paint, and more energy. More fun and games crawling about the roof on ladders!

When we first lived in the new house I was servantless for a while, the Herrero girl having left. I felt I must do something about this, for there was so much to be done in the garden that I did not want to be tied to the house. Imagine my joy, then, when I discovered (just as shearing-time came round again) that Gladstone would a-woeing go.

Disraeli looked a sour misogynist; Gladstone, with his ever-ready grin, was the more prepossessing of the pair. So I put it to Gladstone yet again one day that some dusky maid might agree to wed him if asked. Gladstone had come to the kitchen to beg a box of matches, so I took the opportunity in my best Afrikaans, which by now was sometimes intelligible if not strictly grammatical.

"Gladstone, would it not be a good plan if you really did take a wife who would cook your scoff and wash my dishes?" I asked of him.

To the inevitable "*Ja, missus*," Gladstone, to my delight, added the information that he much fancied a girl "over by so-and-so's kraal".

"Then for the love of Mike marry her, Gladstone," I exhorted, for I was just a bit weary of plate-scrapings, tea-leaves and grease, with which a white woman does not as a rule have to cope in Africa.

"*Ja, missus*," stolidly replied Gladstone.

"What is she like?" I asked.

Gladstone grinned hugely. "Missus, Molefe's girl she is plenty nice and fat."

I nodded understanding. The Bantu likes his womenfolk solid, and has no use for the boyish figure. I could visualize this girl perfectly. Her weight would be about two hundred pounds at least; she would have large, flat, bare feet, which would leave a dusty, woolly-looking spoor across my polished floors; her hands

would be soft and podgy, with sausage-like digits through which my eggshell tea-cups would sift to their doom on the kitchen's cement floor. And then, of course, the girl would utter in a flow of tongue-clicks the equivalent to your English Mary Jane's formula, "It come apart in me 'and, mum." But hope dies hard. Perhaps she could be trained.

"Will they let you have her, Gladstone?" I asked.

Gladstone changed feet, and grinned again.

"Missus, I must pay lobola," he said.

I groaned inwardly, for I knew the ways of lobola move slowly as the law itself. Lobola is the price which a black man pays his intended father-in-law for his bride, and invariably there is much prolonged haggling over the intrinsic value of the lady.

Gladstone spoke again.

"Will missus ask the baas for a pass for me to go to my girl's kraal?"

I agreed, of course, and forthwith sought James. He was frantically busy superintending a band of shearers, clipping the merinos again, and muttering at the same time because an agricultural journal he held in his hand had just informed him that the wool market had stepped on a quicksand.

I put up Gladstone's request.

"Yes, yes," came the irritable reply, "Gladstone can go to the devil if he likes, but I must speed up these shearers and get the wool sent off."

So Gladstone hiked that day to Molefe's kraal, fifteen miles away, and returned next evening with the news that six goats would be accepted as the price of the girl.

Now Gladstone, like most farm boys, was himself an embryo farmer. He possessed ten goats which ran with our flocks, and he was quite willing that three-fifths of these, his total capital, be paid away for the purchase of a comely bride. A nation which sticks to the goat standard, while the rest of the world agitates itself about gold, can afford that sort of thing.

The system of lobola certainly looks as if Kaffir women are sold like chattels. But the women themselves encourage it because they realize it to be their insurance against being handed over to any Tom or Dick for ulterior motives. Out of the offers tendered the best bidder can be chosen, and his worth and financial stability proved by insistence on cattle on the hoof, or goats on the nail, so to speak, before the wedding ceremony (if any). Sometimes, of course, the hire-purchase system is allowed, and a bridegroom pays a lump sum in goats or cows just before the marriage, and perhaps one animal per month for many moons after. But in any case lobola insures the bride, to a certain extent, against ill-treatment by her husband, for she knows that a man is not likely to abuse a female for whom he has paid away more than half his worldly goods—not just at first, anyhow!

If you think the idea barbarous, remember that there are some English customs in connection with marriage which are no better!

So I got leave for Gladstone for a second absence, and saw him set off down the sun-smitten road steering six mottled goats ahead of him. When he returned after delivering his goats I asked him when the happy day was to be (when I should dish-wash no more). The weather was turning hot again, and I badly needed domestic help.

Gladstone looked crestfallen.

"Missus," he said dejectedly, "they say now that six goats is not plenty enough lobola. I must give two more goats."

"The old extortioners!" I exclaimed.

"Ja, missus," agreed Gladstone dutifully, if uncomprehendingly.

"And will you pay two more goats, Gladstone?" I asked.

"Missus, I must, or this girl will marry another boy who can pay."

Poor Gladstone! Was the girl's family playing several beaux off one

against another? Or was some rival pushing up the bidding in this matrimonial auction?

So for the third time Gladstone had to set out for his girl's home; I gave him leave myself this time, without worrying the baas about it again.

Now, the possibilities of steering goats lie in inverse ratio to the number of goats to be steered. To the skilled artist it is a mere bagatelle to guide six animals down the road in a tidy clump; the silly creatures stick together and travel in the way they should go. But one goat, which goes round and round in circles, is the devil, while two goats are little better. As I watched Gladstone trying to get started with his two goats, one of which favoured an eastward journey, while the other galloped off to its little grey home in the west, I sighed in despair for his matrimonial hopes. But Gladstone was a practised hand with goats, and although he made several false starts he finally disappeared down the long dusty road, with the balance of his lobola stepping out lively ahead of him.

Next morning our post arrived (dropped by a passing friend), and a new agricultural journal told us that the wool market was sinking. It gave James the jim-jams. The shearing was finished; the shearers paid off and gone.

"We must drive the wagons to the station and despatch the bales at once. Where's Gladstone?" demanded the baas.

I reminded him of Gladstone's love affair, but added soothingly that the boy should be back any time now.

We waited all day, and even sunset brought no Gladstone. We waited till dinner-time next day.

"Can't you take the two wagons into town alone?" I asked James ingenuously.

"What!" he barked. "Control two spans of sixteen donkeys each by myself?"

"Disraeli——" I suggested.

"Disraeli must herd the sheep here; they must graze or peg out."

We had other odd-job hands on the place, but the baas wanted Gladstone.

At dusk, two days later, by which time the wool market had sunk out of sight, Gladstone returned, and with him were six of his eight lobola goats.

The wrath of the baas overflowed. An expurgated version of what he said would be dull. In any case, Gladstone was not the least bit interested in the antics of the wool market, so long as he received his rations and 15/- a month.

"... and you've obviously been drinking Kaffir beer," thundered the baas, in conclusion.

"Ja, baas." Gladstone confessed to having been in the good company of Bacchus.

Now, deep and prolonged potations of kraal-brewed Kaffir beer (which has a kick in it like a mad mule's) generally celebrates some important event. Often the police get wind of the brewing, and arrive in time to kick over the four-gallon petrol tins of liquid fire before any harm is done. But on this occasion the population of that kraal and our Gladstone had succeeded in having a glorious three days' beano. So when Gladstone pleaded guilty, I put in a question.

"Why did you beer-drink, Gladstone?"

"Missus, it was the wedding of my girl," the boy explained.

"Then since you are married, Gladstone, where is your frau, and why have you brought back six of the lobola goats?" I was puzzled.

Gladstone replied wearily. His grin had gone for good, it seemed.

"Missus," he said, "those two other goats, they run away from me on the veld. So my girl she marry another boy who can pay seven goats for lobola."

"Oh, the grasping little goat-digger!" I gasped. So these people knew all about splitting differences too!

"Ja, missus," agreed Gladstone, as per habit.

There was nothing more to be said. After all the fuss and haggling, not to mention our loss on the wool prices, the woman had decided the finish of the story—as usual. And I continued servantless for a little while longer.

We felt we needed a third trained shepherd after another lambing season had added again to our flocks, so we sent down to the Karroo for a married shepherd, whose wife became my house-girl. The local natives here knew little about herding merinos, though accustomed to cattle and the hardier Afrikaner mutton sheep. The ever faithful Gladstone and Disraeli remained, of course, and stayed for some years.

The manner of Gladstone's going, in the end, saddened us. For after over seven years in our employ he died gallantly and in harness. One year an epidemic of 'flu swept our healthy district, and took us all by surprise. When we three got it, Gladstone came to the house to help the house-girl. Alas, he caught the germ. When I knew it I gave him medicine and a pannikin of hot tea, and told him to go to his pontok and get between as many sheepskins and Kaffir blankets as he could lay hands on. The next morning he turned up in the kitchen again, as cheerful as ever, and on my enquiring, told me he felt quite well except for a headache. I congratulated him on a slight attack, and rejoiced that we were all recovered again. After breakfast he offered to do a morning's washing for me. He sat over the tubs down by the dam and chatted with my small son as he worked, and the youngster "helped" him. His tweed coat, a cast-off from the baas, was spread over a bush close by, lest it get soiled. Would that I had advised him to keep it on! And would that my little boy had chanced to repeat to me the remark that Gladstone made just before he returned to his pontok after dinner—that his chest was beginning to pain him. I could have guessed the true state of affairs, and done what I could to save his life. That evening he did not return to work, and, realizing that he might need a few days to convalesce, I sent the house-girl over with hot supper for him. Next morning when Gladstone stayed away from work James went over to his pontok and came back with the news that the boy felt ill again.

"Let the poor chap sleep it off, as we did," we agreed, and sent over cooked food for breakfast and dinner. At supper-time Gladstone sent word that he wanted no food tonight, but might he have some castor oil. Natives are firm believers in this medicine for everything. But as it happened to be the right thing in this case, we sent him the bottle and some hot tea.

The next morning my small boy wanted to see his beloved Gladstone and took over his breakfast. He came back to say, "Gladstone is still sleeping." As it was early we decided to let him sleep on and went over together later. Little had I guessed the sort of sleep that had already laid its healing hands on poor Gladstone, unrecognized for what it was by the child. Gladstone had died in the night. Had he let us have one message of complaint, one real symptom of how he felt, one whimper, I would have defied the convention that white women do not enter Kaffir huts, and gone over myself to look after our faithful servant. He had always gone through life taking what came to him with cheery optimism, and that ever-ready smile under his quaint, bristly black moustache. He had never been a grouser. So I had taken it for granted that he was convalescing, and contented myself by sending over food, medicine and advice. So Gladstone sleeps now under the rolling sand veld, over which he guided his woolly charges for so many years.

I have perhaps indicated that the South African native is often a shiftless happy-go-lucky fellow, but by long and faithful service Gladstone surely proved that he was what we Europeans so narrowly call "a White Man".

By some wonderful means, known as bush telegraphy, the news of Gladstone's death went around the district as quickly as a spreading grass fire, and a great many natives came to his funeral. We wrapped him in a white sheet, and buried him beneath a kameelboom, beyond the group of pontoks where he had lived.

But this is anticipating. Gladstone, as I have said, was to be with us for several years more on Barenklau.

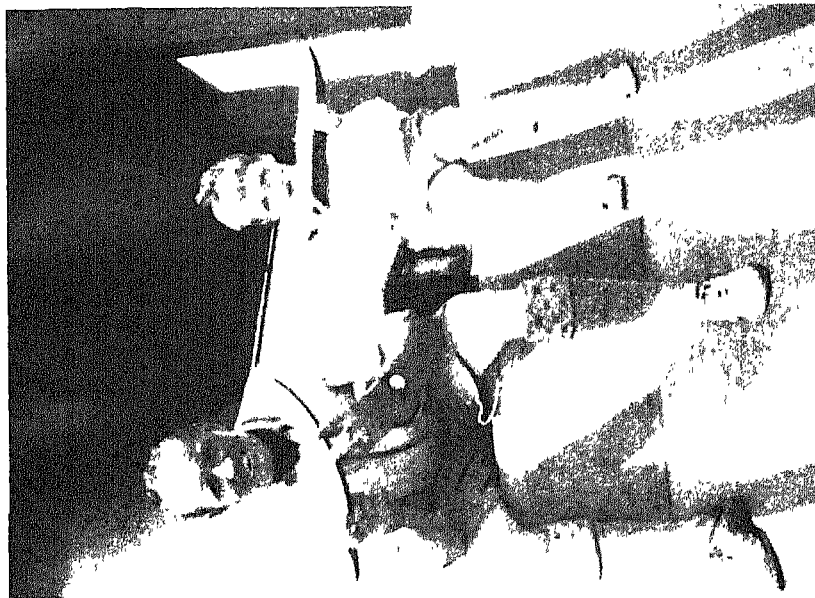
It was during my bout of 'flu, before he himself caught it, that James thought he would try his hand alone at bread-making. Gladstone could not cook, and the present house-girl was not a bread-maker like Katrina had been. His effort was not a success. He vowed the stuff had risen beautifully when he had set the tins of dough beside the warmth of the stove, but that it had become sadly depressed when the cats had walked over the tins! Whatever the excuse, his loaves were reminiscent of our original tombstones at Britstown. He said he would try again.

This time he put the dough on upturned boxes just outside the kitchen door to rise in the sun. It seemed to him an inspiration that Nature's own warmth might give a proper feeling of uplift to the dough where the artificial heat in the kitchen had failed. Leaving them hopefully, he returned indoors. He forgot the bread, until an hour later he received a reminder in the form of a growl outside. In great suspense he rushed forth, to find the boxes upset and our two hounds having a gorgeous time.

Buller, our lately-acquired bulldog, sat with bandy legs outspread, tossing his ungainly head in a vain endeavour to lick down into his cavernous mouth the softest chunk of "bread" that had ever rested on his dear ugly snout. Meanwhile Curly champed his jaws and pawed the side of his muzzle, like a cat washing its face, in his efforts to get his teeth free of the toffee-like substance. One down-trodden loaf remained more or less intact. James threw it over the fence to the hens, who rushed forward with outspread wings and hilarious squawks to bury their beaks in the sticky mess. Such are the joys of catering for a household in the back of beyond!

Shortly after the failure of Gladstone's nuptial plans we took on a second house-girl. She was a Cape-coloured damsel named Katje. She weighed about fourteen stone, and her vanity was equally colossal; she spent all her wages on her back. And no bare feet for Katje! She was a very modern girl, wearing ankle socks and plimsolls. Since she took size eight, it was her sorrow that she could not wear my cast-off shoes. She could, however, make fair copies of my cotton frocks, the models for which were borrowed from the wash-bag. When my cutting-out scissors temporarily vanished, it meant that my wardrobe was being duplicated. She loved scents too. Having finished my lavender-water, she used to besprinkle herself lavishly with vanilla essence in the kitchen. And one day I found her trying on my latest hat. Yet, apart from this clothes-consciousness, Katje was a good sort. She was a grand scrubber, floor-polisher, and cleaner. I sprayed Flit liberally into the hat to daze any imported livestock, and then hung it by its ribbon in the sun on the stoep. A blue jay perched on its brim, and seriously considered the hat as the latest thing in architecture and town planning for a nest.

Katje had a magnificently developed derrière, in which she was like most of South Africa's native women. A rounded rump makes a comfortable seat for both an infant and its mother, and the native women of this country have carried their children riding on the maternal posterior for so long that cause and effect are lost in the mists of time. Which came first, the conveniently large derrière, or the practice of pick-a-back to develop that derrière? Small piccanins are supported sitting above the hump in shawls tied top and bottom across the front of the mother's torso. Think a moment and you will realize that the coloured woman all over the world carries her child cosy and secure against her own body, on her back, astride her hip, and occasionally in her arms. The white woman puts her infant at arm's length in a steel and leather contraption called a pram. In this the poor little wretch feels deserted and insecure, either too hot or chilled, and so it constantly howls fit to dement its whole neighbourhood. Even during a total war in



Eat more fruit!—melon in this case, but in South Africa all fruits grow abundantly. Grapes at twopence a pound, and peaches at two-a-penny are taken for granted by all



Black and White. The native small boy need not worry about keeping his clothes clean, but takes good care of his bow and arrows!



A Hottentot housegirl, always cheerful, a grand scrubber, and a good cook if carefully trained. Nothing pleases her more than to be given your brightest cast-off clothes



Herrero women and little girl. Tall and dignified, the women wear turbans which are brilliant mosaics of multi-colour, and skirts which are always ample and long

which there was no time during a fight for our very existence to worry about luxuries, the white woman agitated for prams.

When I noticed how quiet and utterly contented the native babies always were, I asked one of the mothers to show me the technical details of tying the shawl sling in which the little mites sat so serenely. I had bought a pram for my own child, but after this I often hoisted him on my back, and felt exhilaratingly free to get on with any work I wanted to do, while the baby dozed, or crowed happily in his hammock for unlimited periods. Before, he had been an infuriating little tyrant, like every other prammed infant, demanding that I should stand in impatience and rock him to sleep, while a hundred jobs required doing about the place. The pram now became a museum piece; it had always been an object of open hilarity for any native woman who saw it.

CHAPTER X

MANY OF THE CAPE AND KARROO FARMS RUN OSTRICHES AS WELL AS SHEEP, AND in case the new settler finds himself in one of these regions, a few facts about the birds may be of interest. Though it is not thought that the boom once enjoyed in ostrich feathers will ever occur again. Still, you never know.

Ostrich-farming has also been tried in South-West Africa. And as the birds of this district are those that I know best, I will confine myself to writing of these, especially as any creature in its wild state is more intriguing than in captivity.

Prior to 1914, some German farmers in South-West conceived the idea of crossing the tame ostrich of Oudshorn in the Cape with the wild bird of the species which lives on the borders of the Kalahari Desert. The First World War intervened, however, and the experiment was not tried out to any extent. So the wild ostrich of South-West Africa is to-day as he always was, with perhaps a little blue blood from the aristocrat of the Cape running in the veins of odd cases. He is nevertheless a very handsome, interesting, and useful bird, even if his tail feathers and "tips" cannot compare with those of his Cape cousins. But since ostrich feathers remain at a discount, in spite of the hope ever present in the breast of the Cape ostrich-farmer that they will once more become fashionable, this little point is a detail. In every other way the Kalahari ostrich resembles the South African bird of the Cape.

From his quaint, two-toed feet to the flat top of the tiny head which finishes off his yard-long, tubular, grey, and featherless neck, the ostrich stands quite seven feet in height, and averages two hundred pounds in weight. As chicks the males and females are alike, but when grown the female bird is brown feathered, while the cock is jet black with handsome white plumes in the tail and wing tips. Also in the breeding season the male bird shows red on the bill and legs.

The hausfrau of South-West Africa often makes very fine floor-rugs from the smaller black feathers which cover the wings and body of the male ostrich. She sews row upon row of the feathers on to sugar sacking, or hessian, so that each row overlaps the previous one. The result is a dense "piled" rug to welcome one's feet when stepping out of bed in the morning.

The housewife also makes good use of the ostrich egg, often turning it into excellent soap, with the addition of caustic lye and the rendered-down fat from the large-tailed Blackhead Persian and Afrikander sheep of the district.

The shell of an ostrich egg is pale buff in colour and about a quarter of an inch thick. The neatest method of extracting the contents is to bore a hole at each end of the egg with a brace and bit. The empty shell is sometimes sawn in halves, and the sections thus formed are hung up by children to act as tiny flower-baskets on the stoep. Or, filled with grain or fat and hung in the trees, these half-sections of shell often take the place of the coconut shell which kindly folk in Europe use to feed little wild birds.

The Bushmen, those quaint, pigmy people of the Kalahari Desert, use ostrich-egg shells for a very interesting purpose. When going a long journey a Bushman will cache in the sand at intervals as he travel an ostrich-egg shell which he has filled with water and carefully sealed up. Thus he is sure of a supply of water on his return journey, for in such a country drink is of very much more importance than food. To the mind of the white man it remains a mystery how a Bushman ever finds his water depots again in a vast, undulating region, stretching for hundreds of miles in wave on wave of shifting sand-dunes, peppered in deadly, bewildering monotony with hook-and-stick bushes and kameelboom. Thanks, however, to his unerring bump of locality, the Bushman can travel, live, and survive in a great thirstland which most white men penetrate with trepidation. A certain amount of Bushman history has also been gleaned through the quaint paintings these people used to do on the surface of ostrich-egg shells, which from time to time have been found in the caves or sands of the region. For his women-folk the Bushman sometimes carves out strings of tiny beads from ostrich-egg shell.

The contents of one ostrich egg equal approximately twenty domestic hen-eggs. The albumen is much more glutinous, but the egg is quite usable for cakes, omelets, puddings, and all kinds of cookery.

If you are wise you do not take eggs from a well-filled nest. When you find twenty or more eggs clustered together in a hollow in the sand, leave well alone, as they are probably undergoing the process of being hatched.

The sun and hot sand help considerably in the incubation of ostrich-eggs, so that nests can safely be left by the parents for any reasonable time their instinct may prompt. On ostrich farms the birds are paired, and each pair kept separate during the breeding season, but the wild ostrich of South-West is polygamous. The queerest fact about him, though, is that he takes his turn with the females in sitting over the eggs, and also takes his fair share in rearing the chicks when they hatch out at the end of forty-two days. His paternal duties are no sinecure, for many hens which have been laying do not follow up that function by brooding, and hold an entirely irresponsible attitude towards their potential offspring.

At the beginning of this century, when ostrich feathers were fashionable and there was a boom in prices, a cock bird at the Cape was sometimes worth £1000, and eggs were very valuable. Imagine, then, the feelings of the young farmer who opened an incubator to cool the eggs, and forgot all about them until the next morning! He thought the whole lot, worth a small fortune, were chilled and ruined. But mercifully the night was warm, and so the chicks in due course hatched out.

In South-West Africa the red jackal devours many ostrich-eggs annually, and also accounts for many of the young chicks. So that of all the eggs laid on the veld it is reckoned that barely fifty per cent are hatched out or reach maturity. To crack the shell, the jackal paws one egg up the side of the sandy hollow and lets it roll down again to smack against the rest of the nestful.

Ostrich flesh is dark brown in colour when cooked, and although it has a

"wild" taste, it is fine-grained and good to eat to those who can appreciate the flavour. Peculiarly, there is just one muscle in the thigh which tastes "tame". Treated like venison, and larded with bacon, ostrich meat is considered a delicacy by many. The Herreros and Hottentots love it in any form, and at any time, so that the farmer always pleases his native herd-boys, as well as saves his own purse, if he can present them with ostrich flesh instead of the two sheep per head, per month, which is their due in addition to their pay.

A great deal of ostrich meat is turned into biltong, which I have described already.

When ostrich-skin shoes and handbags became fashionable in Europe, the skin of a bird, valueless before this, became worth £1. Such fashions in furs and feathers often lead to wholesale slaughter among the creatures temporarily "favoured", but in this case Government wisely put an export tax of ten shillings on every skin. There is also a tax on all biltong sent out of South-West territory. So although the Kalahari ostrich is considered "vermin", and no game licence is needed to shoot him during the season from April to September, he is partially protected from any who might exploit him and hunt him to the point of extermination because of his many uses.

To the mind of the South-West African farmer the wild ostrich is better dead than alive, for not only does one bird graze off as much as would feed five sheep, but he has the destructive habit of pulling up grass by the roots, thus devastating the veld on which he feeds.

Strangely enough, ostrich love to run with springbok, though one cannot but wonder that the latter dainty animal does not object to the swarms of loathsome horseflies which always infest the ostrich. In walks across the veld you often see the pointed hoof-marks of springbok mingling with ostrich spoor, and when you surprise a herd-cum-flock of these two very different creatures grazing together on the veld it is exciting to watch the ensuing panic. The buck bound away with the long, graceful springs which have earned them their name, pell-mell with the giant birds who can cover eight feet at a stride.

When running at full speed the ostrich has been known to touch forty miles an hour. If overtaken by a car, a flock will often rush into a panic and career along parallel to the road for a mile or two before veering off on to the veld. Thus the speed test was easy to make. Even when travelling his fastest the ostrich lifts his feet very high in front of him, as if clawing at the ground ahead before pushing it strongly behind him. The absurd thought came to me one day that the bird had learnt this goose-step from the military-minded Germans who had possessed South-West Africa for so long! The gait of the ostrich when running for his life, as he thinks, is very different from his action when grazing serenely in quiet safety. At these times the long-legged bird minces along with but eighteen inches or two feet between the spoor marks. He walks with his wings folded against his sides, but when he runs he slightly spreads the wings to guide and steer himself amongst the tall thorny bushes of the sandy veld where he lives. His wings are big, but the ostrich cannot fly, although his anatomical structure suggests that in this respect he is degenerate and descended from ancestors capable of flight.

To have the digestion of an ostrich in the sense which that phrase always implies is to possess nothing abnormal! The ostrich no more "digests" the stones, nails, glass, tin, and other sharp objects he picks up than we could if we swallowed such things. Professor J. E. Duerden, of Rhodes University College, Grahamstown, S.A., is probably the greatest authority on ostriches, and in a paper read in Cape Town he described exactly what happens when the ostrich picks up those strange additions to its proper diet. The bird retains the bits of glass, iron, and other hard objects in his gizzard, where they are churned

round amongst the food. His last meal is thus ground fine before passing into the stomach, where it is mixed with the digestive juices. These "grits" which do the grinding gradually wear smoother and smaller, in the gizzard, until they dwindle to nothing, but are not, properly speaking, digested as we suppose, for they have never been in contact with the digestive juices of the stomach. The gizzard withstands the wear and tear of the grit which the ostrich is constantly swallowing by virtue of the fact that it is lined with hard, horny fibres backed by a thick layer of white muscle.

From time to time, in ostriches which have been shot locally, rubies have been found among the grits swallowed. The stones are too small to be of commercial value, but the fact is romantic enough! When the annual rains have washed away the surface sand from off the roads of Gibeon, one of our little dorps in central South-West Africa, white children, piccaninnies, and ostriches—the last on the outskirts of the town—forgather to fill matchboxes and their gizzards respectively with tiny rubies. The doctor's wife once showed me her small daughter's collection of these gems.

When in 1926 we first built our lonely farmhouse thirty miles east of South-West Africa's single-line railway track, we used to watch ostrich and springbok grazing scarcely two hundred yards from our sloop where we sat. Since then civilization has crept forward, fencings have been raised, and the crack of rifles is more often heard: consequently the ostrich, along with springbok, gemsbok, kudu, and all the other wonderful wild game of this region, is fast retiring eastward into the sanctuary of the great Kalahari. It is long since we have glanced out of the window while cracking the breakfast egg, and remarked, "There's a flock of ostrich just under that rise," and scarcely a shorter while is it since we have pulled up the car because several dozen of the giant birds were streaming panic-stricken across the road not fifty yards ahead.

Admittedly the ostrich is a difficult creature to stalk and shoot. His sight is extraordinarily keen, and once he has seen the hunter his running powers will save him every time. This is, I suppose, why many people go hunting today in motor-cars. They do not seem to care that it is ruination to any car to tear across trackless veld, crashing over thorn bushes; and less still do they mind being called "no sports". We hold no brief for folk who take such unfair advantage over the creatures of the wild. These, too, are the sort of people who do not trouble to follow the luckless animals wounded by their reckless blazing. Perhaps the petrol is giving out, they want to get home, they are not prepared to face a night's camping out on the veld, and so the wounded creatures creep off to die of pain and hunger and thirst, while the motor-car returns dorpward laden with more carcases than its vandal occupants can possibly use. Hunting on horseback or on foot is the only sporting way of hunting—unless the camera is your weapon.

It was while riding weaponless across the veld one day that we were enabled to see what a gallant fellow, and good husband and father, the ostrich is. Unexpectedly we came across a big male bird with his hen and five chicks. The drab brown youngsters were about six weeks old apparently, and in appearance and size made one think of young turkey hens.

Immediately on sighting us the male ostrich promptly treated us to a display of the weirdest antics. Moving gradually to our left, he held our eyes and attention by his quaint curtsyings, pirouettings, shuffling, and wing-flapping. At last with a final duck and swirl he vanished into a distant clump of thorn bush. Then we turned to each other and asked: "By the way, where have the chicks got to?" To be sure, they had retreated to safety in an opposite direction while their brave parent decoyed us, and held our attention like a clever conjurer, which, of course, was what the gallant bird had intended.

Described like that, the ostrich sounds a nice amiable bird, but there is another side to him.

Having a girl friend staying with us, who wanted to see the farm and surrounding veld, I told James one evening that we were going for a walk eastward, and set out. The rainy season was in full swing, but as this evening was dry and balmy and cool we took the opportunity to walk fast and far. Several miles from home, when deep in a discussion about the latest in frocks, we stopped dead with a sense of shock. We were face to face with a large male ostrich who had stepped from behind a *gavé* bush near by. I think the bird was as staggered as we were! His astonishment, however, lasted only a few seconds. Instead of turning to run from us, he started to come toward us, doing a sort of slow goose-step. As I saw him lift his great feet higher with each step, I informed my town-bred friend:

"The ostrich tramples his enemies to death!"

"How interesting!" said she, drily. If only we had known then that our best defence was one of attack by waving a thorn branch in the bird's face! This always flusters an ostrich, and would probably have persuaded him to make off in haste. Instead, we started walking backward, as if before royalty. We had enough sense left to know that to run would be fatal. Evidently the bird did not like us, but still he came on. Perhaps he had a nest, or a mate, or some babies close by, and was seeing us off.

We changed our course toward a large pan of water to our right. I think the same thought was in both our minds: surely an ostrich could not swim! So the water was our only refuge. Still backing, we found ourselves ankle deep, knee deep, thigh deep, and finally neck deep in the pan. The floor of the pan was very slimy, and I thought of water snakes. But the ostrich still approached steadily, so I thought more about him again. At last we stood side by side in the middle of the pan, clutching hands under water, while our enemy stood on the rim of the pond and craned his neck toward us. Presently he started to walk round us. For about an hour—or was it a week?—he paraded slowly round and round the pan. We swivelled our heads, our eyes, and our bodies cautiously round after him, to keep his moves in view. Once or twice he goose-stepped forward as if trying to make up his mind to plunge into the water and swim for his prey. Sometimes he stood and craned forward and leered at us. Then round and round the pan he went again, with our anxious gaze always following him.

"My neck's beginning to feel like a corkscrew," declared my friend.

"Or a spiral staircase!" I giggled. We were both shivering with cold and a touch of hysteria. The sun was plunging to the rim of the world. It would be dark soon. Heavy clouds were rolling up, and it would pour with rain during the night. Then what? Our teeth were chattering with apprehension.

"He *must* leave us soon," I gibbered wishfully.

"Perhaps," suggested my friend, "he has a wife who's likely to ask him where the heck he's been so long."

How long could we bear this without going crazy? Perhaps we were having hallucinations already, or was that James striding over the veld with a rifle under his arm, and a lantern?

Oh, joy! It was James, followed by Liesel. We hoped he would not miss the ostrich, and shoot us instead. Thank Heaven we had mentioned the direction of our walk before starting out. And how lucky we were that he had found us before it became too dark to shoot!

Five minutes later we dripped homeward, hanging on to each side of James, laughing because we were so near to tears. Liesel galloped ahead, a white guide in the falling darkness, bleating happily now that the shoot was over.

But were our shepherds pleased that the baas had shot them an ostrich? Ostrich meat is a treat they love. Gladstone and Disraeli and the rest willingly went out the three or four miles with lanterns at once, and fetched the great bird home before the jackals came to devour it by night, or the aasvogels by day. The boys politely suggested we should have a share of the flesh, but we did not care to eat our late enemy, even if it is not against international law!

A few days later I was able to show this city girl who was with us a sight which completely banished from her mind the horror of the ostrich adventure. Once more we were alone together out on the veld. But this time it was early morning, a little after sunrise, and we were safely on horseback. As we walked our animals up a long gentle slope we saw an exquisite silhouette pictured against the sunlit blue of the skyline ahead of us: it was a herd of springbok leaping and bounding into the air for no other reason than their delirious gladness to be alive. The air was sparkling, rainwashed and heady on this high veld 4000 feet above sea level, the sandveld was a glittering gold, the world was green and fresh—why not leap for joy? "There's night and day, Brother, both sweet things; Sun, moon, and stars, Brother, all sweet things. There's likewise the wind on the heath." The springbok know all that by a divine instinct.

I sighed with delight, and prayed in the manner of A. A. Milne's Christopher Robin, *changing but the last word*:

"Thank you, God, for a lovely sight."

I think when God had created all the animals He intended for this world—the quaint, grotesque, comical, beautiful, and gaily-coloured creatures, scattered in every country, He must have thought, "I would like to finish off my handiwork with just one masterpiece: something exquisite and quite perfect. It shall be rare. It shall have a royal poise, grace in every movement, loveliness in every line of it. It shall be the spirit of Freedom and Hope Eternal; the Joy of Living incarnate." And so God made the springbok. And South Africa took it to herself as her national emblem.

Undoubtedly it is the interest and excitements afforded by the wild creatures of the veld that constitute quite fifty per cent of what is spoken of as "the charm of the veld" to any man sufficiently alive to appreciate charm in anything. Many animals have held us spellbound by the beauty and grace they show in their natural environment, and which they so sadly and inevitably lose in captivity.

One evening, for instance, we drove three miles or so along a bush track from our homestead, and then pulled up at a big pan because the sight that met our eyes was so wonderful. Accustomed to estimating flocks and herds of sheep and cattle, we reckoned that there were about six hundred gemsbok salt-licking around that brak depression. The car's engine, or perhaps the breeze, warned the herd of our presence, for we were to windward of them. With a sweep of spiralled horns all heads were thrown gracefully up, and the stampede began. With a loud drumming of hooves the whole six hundred, spread out almost in single file, their long sloped antlers and lovely bodies silhouetted black against the crimson of a sunset sky, galloped away into an opalescent haze of dust. How we wished we had been armed with a cine-camera! It was a living motion-picture of grace, *joie de vivre*, and proud self-reliance. For it has often been said, by well-known naturalists such as William Long, that in making their escape from danger, real or imaginary, the creatures of the wilds are not possessed with fear so much as with a soaring sense of power and pride at their own fleetness, cunning, and ability to outdo their enemies.

I once put this theory up to a great veld-lover, and he endorsed it, so that

I now like to believe it too. We called him Mac, for he was a Scot who farmed next door to us, seven miles northward, and he had lived on the veld for some twenty-five years. Like many of his kind, this man, one of those younger sons who have not seen Britain for several decades, and who have become part and parcel of the veld they have come to know so well and love, knew as much of veldcraft and nature, though he had never troubled to pen his knowledge, as many a recognized naturalist and botanist. Happily there are many like him out here who can appreciate the charm of the veld, counting the isolation and hardships of living on it as nothing. Such men are the salt of the earth. They feel miserable in a collar and tie, and they love to have the living-rooms of their funny, higgledy-piggledy shacks on the veld festooned, and stacked, and littered with harness, guns, photographic paraphernalia, fishing tackle, and what not, which would make their conventional relations in Britain—the bishops, peers, commercial magnates and other pomposities—affirm that they are better “abroad” than messing up the stately homes of England with their truck. But for broad tolerance, generosity, loving-kindness, and good companionship, these “black sheep”—Mac always called himself that!—make any so-called civilized men look small. They have long since learnt the pleasures

That hills and valleys, dale and field
And all the craggy mountains yield,

to quote Christopher Marlowe, and have learnt, too, to teach the newcomer the same pleasures if he will but learn, with a childlike eagerness that is enchanting.

One day I asked point blank of Mac why, with all the chances he had in his youth to take up a career and make a name and money, he had chosen to come and live out in the blue. He looked at me, and his blue eyes twinkled from out his browned leathery countenance.

“A horse, a dog, and a gun,
And the wide, wide world to roam . . .

What more could I possibly want than that?—And now leave the dam’ dinner to cook itself, and come for a ride,” he said, and led me forth.

Meekly I obeyed. We went for a canter over the veld, and came back to eat sardines and bread, because the “dam’ dinner” had burnt itself “to hell”, as Mac said when he followed me into the kitchen and peered into the pots.

My equestrianism has always been a controversial subject. Mac always gallantly asserted that I was a finished rider. James called me his flying angel! It is said by those who profess to know that you cannot be considered a real horseman until you have been tossed three times. If that is a real criterion, then I certainly can ride!

Like ourselves, Mac had many odd animals around his homestead, and he always vowed they understood every word he spoke to them, just like our animals did. His chief passion was horses. He went everywhere on horseback or by dog-cart, and never could be persuaded to buy a car or lorry. He had “no use for machinery”.

In German days, horses had been bred in South-West to some extent, as the country is practically free from horse-sickness, that sickening, sudden illness which can kill off a good sound horse in a few hours after the first symptoms appear. When we first went to Barenklau there was a group of horses wild on the veld which had been left loose by their late German owner when the Union took over South-West Africa after the Great War. They were happy enough; they had their freedom, ample grazing in this wide, unfenced country, and water

when they needed it from the farm outposts, probably at dead of night. They had more sense than to approach man or his handiworks by day. If on a ride over the veld you met these horses, they would disappear in a cloud of dust. Among them was a splendid white stallion, and Mac swore that he would catch him and break him in if it were the last thing he ever did. Helped by his horse-boys, it took him a year of hard trying. Had he not succeeded then, I believe he would have gone on trying till his quarry died of old age!

Mac did not care so much for cats as we did, so he encouraged the wild birds about his place to be friendly. He certainly seemed to have far more wild canaries on his farm than we did at Barenklau! He also had a tame, one-legged crow, who caused at least one contretemps. We had asked Mac and his sister over to tea one afternoon. (She had come from civilization to spend six months with him.) We waited in vain for their coming till long after tea-time. Then we did our evening chores and routine work. The sun was just setting when, through the short-lived afterglow, we saw Mac's cavalcade spanking up our private track: the dog-cart followed by two mounted native boys and three greyhounds.

Mac and his sister were full of apologies, and asked if they might stay the night. Of course! Unexpected visitations are what you pray for on a backveld farm. The cause of their lateness had been the one-legged crow.

At three o'clock that afternoon, Mac, having climbed out of his working khaki, was shaving. On the sill of the open window, by his dressing-table, the crow perched, and watched him in friendly fashion. The table was littered with bright objects, such as crows love: a couple of metal collar-studs, a nail-file, razor-blades, and Mac's only set of dentures. Unnoticed by Mac, the crow looked over the things speculatively. He chose the teeth—yes, the dentures every time! In a flash he had grabbed them in his beak and was gone through the window!

Consternation flared up in Mac's breast, and spread like fire through the household. Mac, his sister, two kitchen girls, all the piccanins on the place, and such boys as were not doing essential work, started to try and catch the crow. But that perverse bird, who when not wanted would perch on anyone's shoulder and refuse to be dislodged, now kept just out of reach. Sometimes so near, yet never near enough. From bush to bush and tree to tree he led his pursuers, always with a malicious look in his black eyes. They threw pebbles, but he took successful evasive action. At last someone hit him a whack, and he dropped Mac's teeth. They might have hit a rock, but mercifully they landed into a hook-and-stick bush, where one of the large thorns supported them, looking like a miniature tiara on a hat-stand!

But time had passed. Mac finished dressing, the horses were rounded up and inspanned. At last the cavalcade got started—and rolled up to Barenklau in time for supper instead of tea.

Inevitably all sorts of animals accumulate and are acquired on a South African farm. Some of them just come, see, and conquer your heart, and stay for evermore, earning their keep by the affection and devotion they give. Besides Curly and Buller, we now had an Airedale. The cats had increased. Then there was the hideous cow so inclined to wander and to "walk by herself", like Kipling's cat of the "wild wet woods". The cats had become great gourmets about their milk; nothing but warm fresh milk fresh from Liesel or the cow (when available) would please them. They would sit in a silent reproving row under the kitchen table till the latest milking arrived, and then immediately emerge with bright eyes and quivering tail-tips.

We also acquired a baby stembok. A neighbour had shot the little thing's mother before knowing of the baby's existence. He was most repentant, rescued the little one, and brought it to us to rear. We fed it goat's milk from a Worcester sauce bottle, since Liesel, who had willingly foster-mothered merino lambs,

indicated that there was a limit to her good nature! The stembok thrived and grew, and became most friendly. It was never chained up, and we came to love it very much.

A passing trek wagon presented our small boy, now known as the Klein Baas, or little master, with a goat kid. He insisted on calling it George. Imagine the excitement when George grew up and had Georginas of "his" own! With this increase in his stock, the Klein Baas felt himself a real farmer. He announced, "I'm a Boer now!"

Have you ever realized that a farm could well be called Babyland? We were forever having infants of all sorts.

Where else but in southern Africa would one be awakened at dawn, while sleeping in the open, by a goat kid bouncing a lively tattoo on one's face? My subconscious mind, thinking I was attacked by a nightmare—though lobster for supper is not a possibility when living thirty miles out on the veld—caused me to jerk into a sitting position and blink dazedly at the dainty dancer, now skipping off kraalwards.

"Oh, the naughty little thing!" I exclaimed. But isn't that partly why we love them? "Delightfully mischievous" is what we really mean when we say "naughty", and smile as we speak, whether we refer to the human babe or the little animal creature so full of the joy of living.

On a farm you see a bigger variety of babies than anywhere else: foals on long legs like stilts, and pretty calves with a fetching look of mild bewilderment in their velvet eyes; and sausage-shaped, squealing piglets, perhaps destined to be real sausages later, alas! There are wobbly-legged baby donkeys, and waddly goslings, and ducklings with bills like golden marigolds and feet with elastic between their toes. Frisky lambs in all-wool underwear romp gaily, for all their solemn little faces, throwing themselves twistily into the air without a thought as to whether they will land right side up again or not. Yet somehow they always do.

Look under the wings of the old hen who has sat patient and cramped for twenty-one days, or pull open an incubator drawer, and tweeting puff-balls of yellow fluff and down are seen. All these different babies grow up to help us humans earn our bread and butter, but no less loved are the little luxuries we keep—the puppies, and kittens, born in cupboards usually, disdaining the cosy baskets or sack-lined boxes we provide. Then you must add to these the little wild babies that hatch out in our trees, or live under secluded bushes in the farthest corners of the farm: birds, and springbok, and large-eyed wee stembok, and many others.

All these babies cannot but flourish on the open-air, breeze-blown farms of southern Africa: crib babies and kraal babies and Kaffir babies alike; human infants, and the little creatures too. And generally they are all such splendid friends, especially if we show them, and help them along the way of friendship. My own infant learnt to crawl in company with a white Persian kitten. They sprawled and flopped, and collapsed simultaneously, and tried again and again together all over the floor, while a proud mother-cat sitting by to watch, with tail wrapped round her feet, would sometimes throw me a side glance of mock despair, as much as to say, "Shan't we have a job to get them clean again?" to which I could have replied, "You're telling me!"

"Oh, the naughty little thing, to get so grubby!" I would murmur as I scrubbed small garments and smiled. All these babies, whether of the basket, or barnyard, byre, bush or basinette, they "waste" our time or scratch up our gardens, chew up our shoes or prance on our flower-beds, and run in the wrong direction when we chase them to "bed", yet our love for them goes on and on with the happy ever-recurring arrival of all these different babies through the years.

Think of the pretty pictures they make for us. Who has not seen a cheeky puppy, brows wrinkled, head side-tilted, feet widespread, sitting with the last remains of your new hat dangling from his mouth and a look of proud achievement on his baby face, as much as to say, "Look what a good boy am I!" According to the pup's way of thinking, it is as much fun to dismember a hat as we find it is to trim one successfully.

We have all watched the hen who has hatched out ducklings, flustering hot and bothered around the edge of the pond where the fluffy mites are learning to swim, or laughed at the kitten tangled up in a mesh of unravelled knitting, over which we had spent many long patient hours. And once I saw a Swiss goatling repaid for his curiosity by having to run about for half an hour with a rattling, maddening billy-can dangling round his neck. He did not realize that we who chased him wanted to help him, so he gave us a fine run.

What is it in the little creatures that captivates us all? When you look into the innocent eyes of a tiny kitten you think it must be the ingenuous wonder which you see there. When a lamb wobbles up to you, or a child grasps your finger in a tight chubby grip, you are sure it is their implicit trust that charms you.

Their curiosity in all around them, their playfulness, their mischief and demureness, their ambitious independence contrasting with their utter helplessness and dependence, all add to their charm in our eyes—but scarcely explain why we love them.

One night we awoke to a bang-crashing of crockery. We thought of the Zulus again! But this time it was a wild cat who had got into the house through a kitchen window left open by mistake. Seen in the beam of an electric torch he was a magnificent creature, large in body, soft furred—pale grey flecked with black—and stately in pose. He had big bright eyes like flat emeralds, and a very bushy tail ringed in grey and black. The three kittens our Minnie cat had after his visit were obviously sired by him. They were adorable mites when small, and had the fluff of their mother, the colouring of their father, and splendid bushy tails inherited from both parents. They all three went to good homes, but, alas! they rewarded their kind owners by indulging freely in their wild instincts for chicken-killing on a wholesale scale, and eventually had to be shot in each case.

Talking of kittens, we once saw two baby lions on the roadside, while motor-ing away from Barenklau on a holiday trip in a wild region north of Windhoek. With amber eyes, furry coats and jowls, and big floppy paws, they were just like big kittens, and to us were quite irresistible. Forgetting the advice given to visitors to Kruger National Park, where the wild life of South Africa is preserved in freedom, that if you keep moving, or at least stay in your car, you will be quite safe, we stopped Lizzie and jumped out. The babies were startled, and whisked around and dashed away. We scrambled after them, hoping frantically for a second glimpse of them. We panted up a bush-grown slope, and heard them ahead of us. Then James stopped, and his eyes answered my question of "Why?" When baby lions run, they run straight towards father and mother—particularly mother. And we all know what Kipling said about the female of the species being more deadly than the male.

We turned and scrambled quickly back to the car.

CHAPTER XI

SINCE THE NEW HOUSE HAD A NICE TEN-FOOT-WIDE STOEP SHADING THREE SIDES of the building, we thought we would have a few hanging baskets and pot plants

to make it cheerful. Everyone in this country uses empty paraffin or petrol tins and drums painted green for their pot plants, and they don't look bad. We planted "railway creeper" up the front of the stoep, because it is quick growing, and has cone-shaped mauve flowers when in bloom, which are very pretty.

When the shack was empty James busied himself converting the building into storerooms, shearing shed, and garage. The narrow door was replaced by a garage door, the walls and foundations were repaired and properly plastered and whitewashed without and within. And the shack in future became known by the dignified appellation of "the garage". Indeed, it had become much too gorgeous a resting-place for poor old Lizzie, who for so long had stood night and day out in the open, come foul weather or fair, till the rust had corrupted her both internally and externally, and she was afflicted with senile decay, and wheezy noises suggestive of chronic lung trouble.

On those occasions when, almost yard by yard, we succeeded in reaching the dorp in poor ancient Lizzie, we always thought it most considerate of the dorp folk not to laugh at our car. More still, when we were loaded up, far above the Plimsoll line, with stores in wholesale quantities, mail, and ourselves, for the return journey home, we could not think how the good people who always gathered to cheer us off refrained from mirth. We must have looked like something Heath Robinson would draw. Yet only seldom have we caught their faces twitching with well-controlled laughter.

So long as Lizzie went, we did not mind her being the butt of the local wags and wits, but when she started shedding her nuts and bolts on the road, and demanding hairpins from my head for repairs till my hair literally descended, it became a serious matter. In the end I fancy Lizzie had more hairpins under her bonnet than I had! What would a South African farm car do without wire of some sort, I wonder?

Once Lizzie's steering-gear locked, or did something it shouldn't.

"Where are you going?" I shouted above the roar of the exhaust and engine, when the old bus made a dive off the track into a ten-foot ant-hill.

"I'm d——d if I know!" James yelled back.

The damage was only a buckled mudguard, so after fixing up the steering with two or three hairpins we progressed toward the dorp. Eventually we got there. We generally did, though it was most trying to arrive in time for bed-and-breakfast at a house to which we had been invited for tea, as happened to us once. This is bound to happen sometimes in a country "where there ain't no buses running from one's farm to far away"—if one may parody a famous song.

When the engine started playing all the fancy tricks known to machinery, the lights, which ran off the engine, suddenly failed us one dark night on our way home from the dorp. We were just leaving a neighbouring farmhouse seven miles from Barenklau.

"We can lend you a storm lantern," said our hostess diffidently.

"Oh—er—thank you," James said, not altogether succeeding in registering gratitude while accepting the offer. And I could not quite see myself running ahead over seven miles of sand and limestone hollows and hillocks to light Lizzie on her way. I did trot ahead for half a mile, but after turning my ankle in a meerkat hole I gave up. Also James had once got that R.A.F. feeling and had tried to fly a pan, so we stopped in the stilly darkness for a consultation.

"I can't run for seven miles," I protested the obvious.

"And I can't drive her in second gear all the way," said James, thinking that much more important. "The petrol would give out in no time."

We peered blankly at each other.

Then, "You could hold the light and sit on the bonnet," James suggested brightly.

"Thanks!" I said, "but the radiator is boiling."

"Yes, the cap might fly off into your face," he said, which was not what I had meant.

I suggested I should drive the chariot while he ran ahead with the kindly light, but the reply came that he had not run a race since he failed to win a sack race at the tender age of twelve.

Gloom of mind, dark as the murky night itself, descended on our cheerful spirits. Only the Klein Baas slept unconcernedly on a sack of sugar at the back. Then I had an inspiration. Lying prone on the front mudguard, with one arm lovingly clasping a defunct headlight, I extended my other arm, and dangled the lantern before Lizzie's radiator.

"How's that?"

James regarded me approvingly.

"Fine!" he said. "We'll get going again."

I did not feel fine. I felt more like a cross between Florence Nightingale and a Rolls-Royce mascot.

James turned the hurdy-gurdy handle, climbed in over the door, which had jammed for keeps, and which not even strong men could open, and once more blasted the peace of the veld with a roar as of coal being dumped on a tin roof. An affrighted jackal yelped dismally as we bounded forward and ground into first.

The lantern swayed and cavorted gaily before the radiator and cast an illumination as of a jazz-mad searchlight on the track, serving rather to intensify the darkness than to light the way ahead. There was no grip for my toes on the down-trodden old running-board, and as we leaped along that veld track, a good deal worse than any rutted English lane, I slipped lower and lower, in spite of a fierce clutch on the headlamp, until an extra big jolt caused me to bite my tongue severely.

"Wow—ww!" I yelled dismally, and heard James shout something about the "beastly jackals".

Then in a sandy place where track and veld looked alike, James saw crooked, and taking a thorn bush in his stride, bounced under the low-spread branches of a kameelboom. Still valiantly gripping the lantern, I ducked, yet in spite of kissing the mudguard with a smack, my hat was ripped from my head. Had it been pinned on I should have been scalped. The Jehu at the wheel drew up.

"Where the devil are we?" he asked.

"I think the road is about fifty yards to the left," I replied coldly, "—and I paid two guineas for that felt," I added, staring back into the darkness of the bushes through which we had rushed. With the lantern dimly burning we trudged back to find my hat and, more important, the track. We found both, and with myself spreadeagled on the mudguard again we bounded homeward at a pace which gave me a Brooklands sensation under the belt. Ghostly boulders and clutching fingers of thorn swept by beneath my prostrate form.

"Tattenham Corner!" bellowed James joyously as he tore on two wheels round the familiar bend only about a mile from home.

"Good!" I shrieked back, and bit my tongue again. The straight just beyond Tattenham Corner contained a Popocatepetl on the "crown" of the road, over which Lizzie invariably jolted with an ecstatic leap.

We whizzed past the garage and drew up at our own gate. Too stiff to rise, I gently lowered the lantern and rolled sideways off the mudguard on to the soft sand. At that moment the lantern flame flickered, flared once, and went out. The oil was finished.

"Good heavens! It just lasted out. Haven't we been lucky?" I exclaimed.

"Yes, haven't we been lucky?" James agreed with heavy sarcasm. Then

he pulled a long straw-covered shape from under Lizzie's seat and, murmuring something about "lemons and hot water", went indoors in search of tumblers.

I lit the lamps, put the sleeping Klein Baas into bed, lit the primus, and grilled some chops in the pan. The house-girl was not forthcoming from her pontok at that hour of the night to help me. To do her and her dusky sisters justice, they work a very long day as a rule, and also I had discovered by this time that the natives' reluctance to stir out after dark is due to their fear of tikoloshes. A tikoloshe, sometimes called a tokoloshe, is any kind of spook, but, strictly speaking, is a ghost who hurls slabs of earth and stones at you in the dark. Many natives are to be found who vow they have been so attacked at night-time.

James handed me one of two steaming dop hot toddies he had prepared in pint tumblers. The chops were ready, and I carried a trayful of food and crockery into the living-room. Life was not so bad after all.

"You'll feel all right in a moment," said James.

"Hot toddy can't cure my sixth and seventh ribs, which have interlocked," I said, "nor rectify the fact that my spinal column has jammed and my fourth cylinder has——"

"Drink it up—or rather down," he interrupted heartily. I did so, and presently jumped into bed as the thing came to meet me.

Shortly after this Lizzie played us another shabby trick. We had planned a day's hunting on the veld with Mac and his sister. The start from their farm was timed for 9.30 a.m., so having spent the three previous hours scrambling through a day's work, and breakfast, we left home at about 8.45 a.m. Lizzie roared along gaily for about three miles, then——

"What's the knock?" I asked, growing suspicious. The question was hardly spoken when Lizzie replied with a loud *clank-clankety-clank!* We stopped, got out, and got under, suspecting the crankshaft. James lay prone on his back underneath Lizzie and unscrewed things. Yes, the crankshaft was cracked. There was nothing for it but to push Lizzie aside and footslog to the rendezvous. Dressed in a felt hat, short cotton frock, strong low-heeled shoes, and the bare legs habitual to veld-dwellers in South Africa, I arrived sun-scorched, and with two lovely skinned heels. Mac had given us up and was just considering starting away without us. James had carried the Klein Baas.

Soap was rubbed on my heels, and we all drank some hot coffee, after which we started immediately, since it was already late, and the game would be lying up for the day in the shade of bushes and trees. We really formed quite a cavalcade. Mac, James, and a native boy rode horseback; another boy, with whom the Klein Baas elected to travel, piloted a four-in-hand hitched to a trap more ancient than modern, which was to carry the game when shot; while my hostess and I brought up the rear in a dog-cart drawn by a pair of bays. We whipped up and set off eastward.

At first the going was flat, and all we had to do was crash over thorn bushes and steer between the high ant-hills. All went well until my hostess got on to the subject of hats. Then of course the horses, left to themselves, ran our right wheel on to an ant-heap which nearly upset us. The mounted boy came to disentangle us and we sailed forward again, grim in our determination to keep off millinery.

Later we reached the sand-dunes and started to see-saw up and down the most prodigious dunes, which followed each other like the mountainous waves of some vast petrified sea, in line upon line. In this district, if you should ask a native "How far is it to so-and-so?" he will reply, "About twenty dunes," or "Fifty dunes away." Here they have no other measurement of distance.

While crossing the grassy valleys between the dunes we whipped the horses

into a run, so that with this impetus to help them we raced up the lower half of the next dune ahead, till the sand grew soft, and the incline too stiff for anything but a staggering struggle on the part of the horses. A moment's pause while we perched silhouetted on the crest of the sandwave two or three hundred feet above the valleys behind and before, then clinging together as the high trap swayed drunkenly, and the horses slithered on their hindquarters through the yielding sand, we plunged downhill into the next vlei, to repeat the performance again and yet again. Led on and on by the riders and the cart ahead, we felt we must soon go across the whole Kalahari! I counted twenty-seven dunes, and then gave up counting. And all the morning we raised nothing but a little stembok, which was allowed to go in peace, since we were looking for gemsbok.

At 2 p.m. a halt was called, and we enjoyed a picnic lunch, of sandwiches, cakes, and fresh-brewed tea, under the sun-dappled shade of a kameelboom. Then on eastward again, up and down those interminable dunes.

About 5 p.m. the hunting started. We had missed our early-morning opportunities by setting out late. As the trap lurched on to the summit of yet another dune, and poised there, we saw the riders on the next dune's crest turn right, and, sharp against the skyline, gallop along the ridge. Presently they plunged down into the valley between us where a herd of some two hundred gemsbok had taken fright and were galloping away in a cloud of sand raised by their rhythmically thudding hooves. Seen from about three hundred yards distant through the clear desert air, the flying herd, the racing riders with rifles carried ready, and the spurts of sand flying from under their horses' feet, the scene was like a cowboy film!

Presently from far up the valley came shots. We tore downhill and followed up, arriving to find a big buck breathing its last under a *gavé* bush into which it had backed to stand at bay while Mac's greyhounds baled it up and held it until the men arrived to shoot. Perhaps I am no sportsman, but I confess I did not enjoy seeing that glorious animal dying, and implored Mac to put another bullet into its brain. He did so promptly, albeit with a smile at such foolishness. After all, he was shooting for the pot, and never did otherwise. A licence to shoot one buck cost £1, and farmers really only shoot for meat, as a rule, being content with their one animal.

Once, however, the small daughter of a neighbouring farmer gave him away nicely when he had been breaking this law. He had taken out the usual licence to shoot one buck, and when the monthly police patrol next called at his place the friendly policeman asked chattily if he had got his game yet.

"Yes, I got a beauty," said the farmer.

"But, Daddy," chipped in the little girl, "you got three!"

The policeman was tactfully deaf as he continued to eat the meal which the farmer's wife had hospitably served him.

Gemsbok flesh when roasted or casseroled is almost indistinguishable from good beef. Pickled, boiled, and eaten cold it is even more delicious than cold corned beef, since the grain of the meat is finer, while the biltong made from gemsbok is, in the opinion of many people, superior to that made from any other game. The skin is excellent for reims when cured, cut into a long spiral (starting from the edge of the skin and working inward) and then stretched straight. This last is done by looping the length of reim over and over a tree bough in long festoons, weighting with a heavy stone or bar of iron, twisting until the loops are quite tightened up, then letting go so that they unwind with a spring. The process is repeated until the reim is straight, soft, and pliable. It is then cut into required lengths for harness, tethering ropes, criss-cross seating for chair seats, and, divided up finely, even for bootlaces. Gemsbok hide, when home-

tanned and "brayed", is also very useful to the farmers for soling farm footwear for themselves and their boys, and for making veldschoen.

In the excitement of the hunt we had all overlooked the time. The sun was sinking, and the shadows were very long, when we thought about getting home again. Then the burning question arose as to how exactly the Barenklau outfit was to get home at all! Lizzie was *hors de combat* miles away, one trap here was loaded with game, and since our hostess did not ride at all we could not borrow the second trap. In the end Mac said if I were game to ride I could have his horse, and we could ride straight home from where we were. He joined his sister in the dog-cart, we said thank you for a lovely day's outing, waved, and parted company.

Having made a detour, in spite of the impression that we had been heading across the Kalahari, we were apparently only eight miles from Barenklau's boundary, so James, the mounted boy, kindly lent us as escort, and I started off hopefully homeward. The Klein Baas was now riding before the saddle of the Baas.

Being thinly clad, I felt I could do no more than walk my horse. But the sun was nearly gone now, and we had to sight some landmark, such as our eastern camp windmill, before darkness came, so I had to put up with the discomfort of bare knees and legs against saddle and stirrup leathers, as we "gollied" along, to quote the Klein Baas' description of a canter.

Uphill and down vleis we hurried, with one eye on the lurid west and the other watching for the windmill, which seemed to be nowhere in that wide expanse of country. At last the native's keen eyes spotted it, looking like a tiny toy, and I heaved a sigh of relief as it had begun to seem as if we were lost. From the mill a three-mile track led home, so although darkness had descended the going was easy now, and we slackened the pace for the sake of the weary horses.

Once more thanks to Lizzie's pranks we arrived home very tired, albeit with a happy tiredness—to find a visitor on the doorstep, sitting on the verandah of the unlit house! There was supper to get together, the guest's bed to make, and the horse-boy's food to arrange for, with a large mug of "kawffee" to comfort him for his extra ride on our account.

The next day, a generous cut of gemsbok meat arrived from Mac. This sharing of game is customary. Next time we would get the licence and do the entertaining.

Lizzie's engine became so stiff with old age and rough going over veld tracks that on cold mornings she refused to start despite any amount of boiling water poured into the radiator. So if we wanted to make an early start for the dorp we used to drive her up a nearby hill the night before, and start from there after some hearty community-showing by Gladstone and Disraeli. The last time we started from there we looked back when half-way down the hill to see Disraeli and Gladstone in the middle of the road lying flat on their stomachs with their chins in the dust. It is always a mistake to let go too late. But we had no time to worry on their account, for it was just at this moment that my spouse remembered out loud that he had forgotten to mend the foot-brake with baling wire before leaving home. Apparently the gate in our boundary fence at the foot of the hill sensed the omission. Anyway, it ran up hilariously to meet us, and welcomed us with an imperial whack. While my partner tried to swallow the steering-wheel, I took a flight over the fence in search of a nice landing-ground.

The gate had lost the contest, so we were able to proceed. A little later we were successfully zooming through a mile of deep sand, and I don't yet know why

James trod on the petrol switch. It will be remembered that in the more prehistoric models of a certain make of car the switch was situated near the gear pedal, where it was easier to hit than miss. Well, our Liz was created in those good old days.

Lizzie coughed into a horrid silence, and I turned to regard James with dismay, but found him busy saying "Abracadabra" three times. Nothing magical happened, however. In fact nothing happened. Alas, Disraeli was ten miles away, in the kitchen preparing burnt offerings against our return in the evening, and Gladstone was with him uprooting our tomato seedlings from among the pretty weeds. So leaving Lizzie in gear we descended to earth and pushed from the rear.

When the engine spluttered, Lizzie leapt forward with a bound. We hastily picked ourselves up, spat out our respective mouthfuls of sand, and dived on board. Unhappily, Lizzie's steering-wheel got an attack of D.T.s or spavin, or something, just before we could lay hands on it, and our chariot embraced a six-foot ant-heap. Like everyone artistic, Lizzie is extremely temperamental.

We shunted Liz back on to the main line and James dug out the iron and went for'ard to try and crank. A baby baboon, its curiosity greater than its fear of man, came and sat on a sunny rock to criticize his technique. The little creature did not wear a red flannel petticoat, so I don't know why my good man turning the handle in front of the radiator got so huffy when I started to hum "Oh, Oh, Antonio!"

Then just when I thought Lizzie's mainspring must snap with all this overwinding, the old musical box emitted a tune like a cross between grand opera and the Victoria Falls run amok. The baby baboon didn't wait to hand round the hat. He just skipped.

Our troubles were over until next time, and we buzzed along the jolly old highway. But just as Lizzie was emulating the Bluebird nicely, a nasty noise like a Christmas ghost hopelessly entangled in its chains smote our ears. The owner-driver pulled and trod and pushed everything simultaneously, and we stopped.

"Sounds like the crankshaft throwing up the loofah again," I said helpfully. We climbed off once more, got out the book of words and the hammer, and crawled underneath. With feet sticking out to port and starboard, we unscrewed things in the belly of the whale, so to speak, until a flow of oil from the sump on to our hopefully upturned faces indicated that we had finished.

"Tisn't the crankshaft," gargled James.

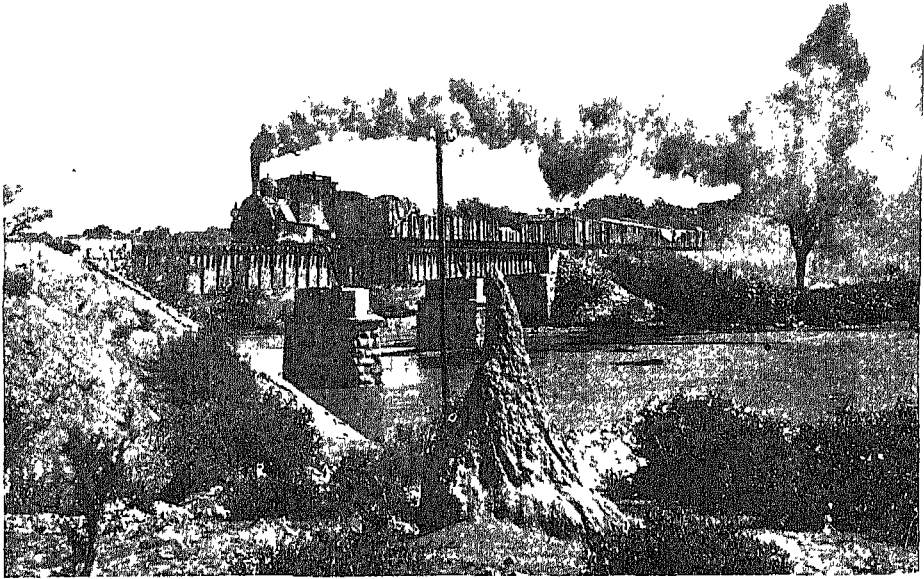
We tried everything. We jiggled the petrol switch. We waggled the carburettor, joggled the coils, pulled the crackers, kicked the radiator, and invoked Government help. No one can do more than that. Woe were we, and there we were, so to speak.

Then I suddenly noticed that the one remaining hind mudguard had fallen off on to the road. Hence the Christmas clanking. We need not have stopped at all. So, leaving the defunct mudguard, we proceeded again towards the winning-post. We never, on principle, pick up anything Lizzie sheds. Up to date she has jerked off two mudguards, one lamp, two springs, ninety-nine nuts, one running-board, and innumerable passengers.

"The less of this bus the better," I said, rather vindictively I admit.

"You bet," agreed James, but added: "Still, it's not such a bad old hay-wagon really; it always gets us there in the end."

So it does. And that's why we both felt peeved at the end of this trip when we finally drew up in front of the dorp's main store, and the gentleman who sells us all our dry goods, on long credit and 300 per cent profit, waddled out, regarded our Liz, and said, "What you people want is a new car!"



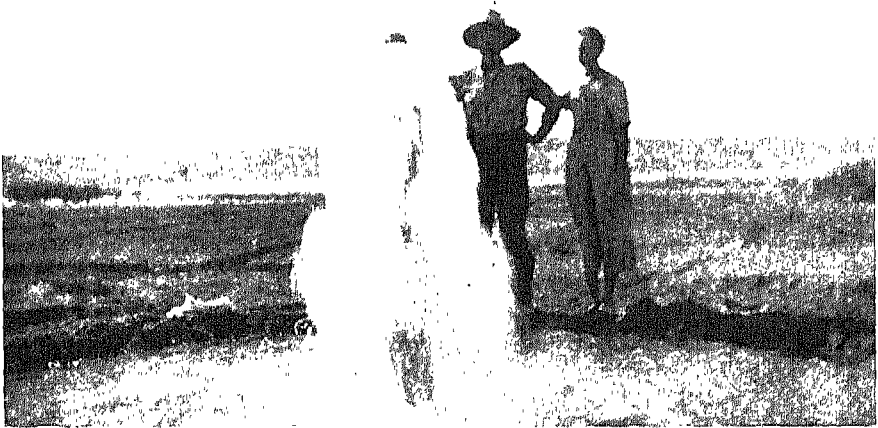
A goods train on the narrow gauge railway near Omaruru. The cone-shaped "rock" in the centre foreground is an ant-hill.



The Donkeymobile—a favourite family conveyance with inexpensive and friendly motive power. The light chassis mounted on motor tyres is ideal for travelling over rough country.



A typical irrigation dam in South-West Africa. Water storage in a dry country is a first consideration, whether behind earth embankments, in stone-built reservoirs, or corrugated iron tanks.



Artesian water in the Aub Valley. Some gushers yield 1,000,000 gallons a day in a district with no surface water except during the scanty rainy season.

It was obvious that Lizzie's end was near. Inevitably she broke down yet again, this time on Barenklau itself. So she was towed by two horse-power into the dorp to a nursing home for auto-derelects. James looked fine starting off with the steering-wheel in one hand and a sjambok in the other with which to persuade the horse-power. He reminded me of the native chief who was wont to attend state functions dressed in top hat and Jap kimono, sitting in an engineless old car drawn by a team of oxen. It must have taken James the whole day to get into the dorp, and I let him go alone!

When convalescent and eventually restored to us, Lizzie lost no time in playing her very last prank on us, giving me an agitated night alone on Barenklau. James had gone into the dorp by himself for the day, and when he failed to return at sunset I mentally ticked off all the lures of the village which might have detained him: the bars, pretty girls, and "business", that most vague and delightful excuse of all. With midnight came a dreadful feeling of certainty that something tragic had happened. Then at 2 a.m. I at last heard the quiet hum of a car quite unlike Lizzie's familiar rattle and blast.

"Here," I thought, "is somebody coming to tell me I'm a brand-new widow!"

A strange new car drew up and, to my astonishment, James's voice spoke from its depths.

"But where's Lizzie?" I asked.

"That unmentionable car broke her back axle umpteen miles from everywhere on my way home, so that I had to footslog all through the night back to the dorp, and——"

"Borrow this car?" I interrupted.

James grinned in spite of his weariness. "No, *buy* this car!" he said triumphantly.

Fed up to the eyes, he had recklessly stumped into the garage after a ten-mile tramp through the darkness, selected a car by lamplight, and driven home in it. It is possible to do this sort of thing at any time here; probably the foundation for the deal was laid at the hotel bar, for any man's first wish after a ten-mile walk over the veld must be a drink. And if you are friendly, people will sell you things all round the clock in a dorp, especially in an emergency.

We had said good-bye to poor old Lizzie. We arranged to have her towed in again off the veld, and parked in the dorp until her bits and pieces could be sold. Oh yes, you can sell just anything in South Africa. I once saw an advertisement in a Rhodesian paper which said: "Good make of car for sale, £2. Or will sell tyres separately for £1."

Our new model was a half-ton lorry of the same make as our late chariot, so for old times' sake we continued the name Lizzie.

We decided to take great care of Liz II, and not to use her recklessly. Yet our problem of frequent transport around farm camps, and to the distant dorp, had to be solved.

Happily, it was at this time that the donkeymobile came into being. One after another cars were being scrapped or converted, and a new and wonderful vehicle was seen on the alleged roads of the country. On dance nights our dorp's hotel yard was no longer a parking-place only for Baby Bengers, saloons and sedans and two-seaters. Instead the donkeymobiles rattled in with a jolly jingle of harness, and the owner-drivers, assisted by their glad-ragged fraus, outspanned the motive power and herded their mokes into the hotel's private kraal.

Obviously a donkeymobile would not be all joy, but when we sold the first Lizzie we went in for the new type of vehicle. Old Lizzie was sold piecemeal. The dorp butcher bought the rubber flooring for a bath-mat, the baker took

the klaxon to play in the Mariental jazz band, and a Scotch storekeeper bought the engine as a Christmas present for his little boy, because he said he couldn't afford a Meccano set. The body received decent burial. We gave the hind axle and wheels to a neighbour in payment for some grazing he had lent us when his farm had rain and ours didn't, so that there remained to us, after all this, the front axle and wheels. And that was all we needed. On this axle we mounted a trap, made by James from planking, and added a shaft. And thus we had a donkeymobile. For the definition of a donkeymobile is the body of a dog-cart, Cape cart, or even a piano case, mounted on two motor wheels. Although a car-body is rather heavy for the purpose, some people actually chopped their ancient cars in two, mounted the halves separately, added shafts, and, lo, they had two vehicles!

The donkeys came free, as herds of this South African fauna habitually graze on our farm gratis. Though since the donkeymobile has become more and more popular throughout the platteland, mokes have soared in price in a most unheard-of manner.

"Think of the advantages of a donkeymobile," gushed a visitor staying with us just then. We did think. No longer would I have to denude my coiffure of hairpins to repair Lizzie's old innards on the road. We could travel to the dorp by a much shorter but sandier track, impassable for cars; our motive power would not drink petrol at 3/6 a gallon, and, without the weight of an engine, punctures should not occur. Also, by having to start and return early, we would no longer arrive home at 10 p.m. to a dark and supperless homestead; and then too—oh, well, the advantages seemed endless. I diffidently mentioned the point about relative speed, and was told that a team of good mokes "can simply fly along", whereupon I thought of painting "Flying Scotsman" on the donkeymobile, but was incontinently ridiculed out of court.

So one sweet dawn we arose at 4 a.m. to make our first thirty-mile trip to the dorp in the donkeymobile. Oh, the deliciousness of that South African early morning! The hens were flying the wire into the garden, the oranges were ripening, and the natives still sleeping. Disraeli alone had been yanked out of his pontok to make what he could of the monkey-puzzle sold to us as second-hand harness, and to inspan the six mokes. This done, we started with a merry chorus of hee-hawing instead of an engine blast.

Barring a puncture (you can't go right through life without a little trouble), all went well until we reached the last sand-dune to be crossed.

The dune was steep, and the mokes strained heavily at their harness. The two leaders staggered bravely. Good old Amos! Plucky Balaam! A little more and we'll be up. Gee-up!

"The car would have stuck here right enough," I said.

"Yes, rather," agreed James feelingly, "but this outfit won't get stuck."

It didn't. On the contrary, something about the harness came unstuck. Then the suddenly released mokes catapulted over the crest of the dune and vanished like ghosts at dawn! The abandoned cart slithered sickeningly backward and the shaft shot into the air.

Our visitor shouted, "We're killed!", and dived overboard among the snakes in the grass. I said feebly, "We're stuck!", and James ground out something that made a lady stembok break cover and run for her life.

We breathed hard and pushed the donkeymobile to the top of the dune. We retrieved the donkeys, disentangled them from the welter of reins around their ankles, upended the creatures, and draped all the leather around their necks again.

"Give me some hairpins," demanded James, using a familiar formula. Although I had in the beginning avoided the word "obey", I meekly handed

over all the ironmongery from under my terai, and our visitor, though a spinster and a free woman, did the same. So the harness was repaired, and all made ready for a fresh start in life down the far slope of the sand-dune.

The gradient looked like one in four, and we did not relish that Seagrave sensation under the fifth rib as we whizzed down toward a sort of Becher's Brook at the bottom. The donkeys apparently had no Irish blood in them, but the donkeymobile decided to take a chance and jump it. It did this quite successfully, but of course overshot the mokes, who promptly had an apoplectic fit under the floor-boards that made Dante's *Inferno* sound silly.

Meanwhile we emulated *Fighter Command* through the air. My visitor landed sitting in a thorn bush, James butted an outcrop of ironstone, and I sank my teeth into the sand. Ten seconds later we all said, "Oh dear!" and ran to save our faithful four-hooved friends from strangling and dying in harness. To our credit be it written that in all that puzzle there was no cross word.

"Give me some hairpins," came the old refrain. Our heads were empty, but our handbags yielded up three safety-pins, one nail-file, one yard of elastic, powder-puffs, three hankies, two inches of hat wire, and six cachous. Since the number coincided, we revived the donkey team with a cachou each, and did what we could with the other stuff in repairing the harness.

Shortly after we got going again we came out on to the hard high road, and felt it was jolly good to be alive at all.

The next crisis came when we approached the railway crossing. Then suspense galloped to a climax, as the short-story writers say, when Amos, our left leader, accelerated to race the oncoming mail train, which he evidently hoped to beat at the crossing.

The Baas fumbled for the foot-brake, but found it and the hand-brake were not there now. Then he whistled. But although every respectable quadruped in Africa knows that to be the signal to cease running, Amos pelted on. Perhaps he'd heard of Nat Gould, or maybe he held a ticket in the Irish Sweep. Anyway, there was Amos galloping by. And since racing fever is infectious, our visitor and I became thrilled to the bone as we rapidly neared the train.

"Ten to one on the engine!" I yelled.

"You ass! Fifty to one on Amos!" barked our lady visitor. Then she shut her larkspur-blue eyes, my better half said something irrelevant about Mephistopheles, and I prayed to Gandhi instead of Allah by mistake.

We clattered across the metals. There was a wild shriek from the engine, which mercifully obliterated the driver's mouthings, and we were safely away up Main Street at a ballyhoo pace. I wondered where the winning-post would be next time, and thought of Christopher Robin, who said, "Where am I going? I don't quite know."

At Tattenham Corner we beat an ox-wagon simply standing, left a Baby Glaxo behind on Epsom Downs, and flattened out two more cars and three pedestrians at Valentine's Brook. Finally we fetched up in the stationmaster's office, precisely at mid-day, with heaving flanks and tongues dripping--the donkeys', I mean. Amos wanted to plunge through into the booking office, but was sobered by a new list of raised fares on the wall.

Then the entire team hee-hawed, and everyone in the dorp was so entranced that most of the excitement usually lavished on the bi-weekly mail train was diverted to ourselves.

And, as we had foreseen, we did not arrive home at 10 p.m. that night to a dark and supperless farmhouse, because we didn't get back until two days later, after having bought a new set of harness at 3/6 a foot, endless pounds of donkey food, two days' hotel accommodation, and a tombstone in very loving memory of old Lizzie.

Where, oh where, we asked, was that fellow who had said a donkeymobile was so cheap to run?

If all that sounds exaggerated, let me say it is very hard to overpaint a ride in a donkeymobile. The conveyance is still with us, and in spite of the family's first protest, is always grandly referred to as the Flying Scotsman.

The reason for retaining the motor tyres is that these wheels are eminently suitable for the sandy roads of the country, and also cost less in upkeep than ordinary trap wheels, which split and go to pieces so quickly in the heat and dry climate. I don't know who first thought of the donkeymobile, but he deserves a statue designed by Hardiman or some other sculptor of alleged equestrianism.

CHAPTER XII

SHORTLY AFTER WE ACQUIRED THE NEW LIZZIE MY BROTHER CAME FROM INDIA to visit us. It was when the time came for him to leave us and continue his journey to England via Cape Town that we had the inspiration to accompany him as far as the coast, in Lizzie II. The new car being a two-seater lorry, there was no difficulty in stowing his kit and our suit-cases, not to mention the supplies required for the trip. Our intention was to camp on the veld as we went along, instead of staying in dorp hotels. On a 900-mile journey through very sparsely-populated country, and over unknown roads, you could never be sure of reaching a hotel each night, as every South African knows.

During our absence, Gladstone was to be responsible for the sheep, cats, dogs, fowls, etc. So having implored our good neighbour, Mac, to ride over sometimes and keep an eye on Gladstone and the rest, we overhauled Lizzie, filled her up with petrol, water, and oil, and loaded an extra supply of each on the lorry. We sailed out of Mariental after lunch one warm, albeit winter, afternoon, and bowled along the smooth hard road to Gibeon station forty-two miles on. The rail track ran parallel a few yards to our left, and six miles to the east rose our familiar home, the Kalk plateau. After passing Gibeon the country continued flat, and was generously strewn with small bush, except where long lines of green mimosa indicated waterways.

What an adventure it was crossing those deep sluits! Lizzie stepped gingerly down the first steep bank, and then immediately upended to hoist herself up the opposite bank with an angry roar. We discovered on the return journey that we had taken a by-road by mistake and should really have avoided these waterways. They were fewer and less dreadful along the main road. But such a mistake is fatally easy in this country, for rural South Africa is as nearly devoid of signposts as does not matter. It is possible to motor fifty or sixty miles in the wrong direction before meeting a post or a person to put you right again.

Late that first afternoon a jagged mountain, carved, it seemed, from fairy-blue cardboard and laid against the sky, rose over the horizon and broke the flatness of the veld.

That night we camped under the mountain's friendly shadow. While the two men collected dry sticks for our fire, I unpacked the chop-box and prepared our sleeping-places. My brother boasted a camp bed, my son fitted cosily into the seat of the car, and James and I discovered the hardness of a steel-ribbed wood floor when we stretched ourselves out in the lorry. Many South Africans,

when camping, prefer sleeping on Mother Earth, but the thought of snakes and stinging scorpions deters others from such a bed.

We made tea and breakfast very early next morning, struck camp, and at dawn were off along the road to Keetmanshoop. A big red jackal, hunting late, stood stockstill and amazed as we sped past; half a dozen springbok bounded away at our approach, while a small group of wild ostrich split into two and, in frantic efforts to reunite, crossed and recrossed the road before Lizzie's very nose.

Keetmanshoop is 182 miles from Mariental, and is a fine town with broad, pleasant streets, trees, shops, hotels, and garages galore, and is electrically lit throughout. On leaving Keetmanshoop the road is good; then very bad, with a river-bed to cross, and then medium as far as a little settlement called Narubis, about sixty miles further on. After Narubis we passed through country where milk bush grew thickly and high, and in the distance saw a range of mountains, purple and gold in the afternoon glow, with spreading camelthorn trees, so typical of South-West, sharp against the deep background of the hills. Later we climbed into these hills and spent the evening travelling through them.

We passed under the shadows of the peaks to emerge again into sunlit valleys, where the long rays of the setting sun had pierced to show us the homesteads of mountain farms. Sheep and sure-footed goats seemed glued to high rocky precipices, and apparently preferred to nibble there than to graze on the lush carpet of sour grass which covered the lower slopes. Perhaps the creatures knew instinctively that sour grass does them no good until it is dry and seeding.

Night caught us in these mountains and we had to camp among the kloofs and krantzies. Though had we foreseen the wet cold mist that enveloped us from midnight till sun-up we would have tried to push on. Safe and protected within the car, the Klein Baas alone escaped the chill dampness. We three grown-ups got soaked, and reacting like food-coolers in the dawn wind which arose about 3 a.m., we froze until morning. We were unable even to console ourselves with a fire owing to all lack of dry sticks. Later the sun cheered us as usual, and we ran down the foothills, where wide stretches of high, thick-growing Bushman grass reminded us of fields of ripening oats. Trees and bushes, all flourishing after recent rains, were a jade and gladdening sight. Even the most desert strips of southern Africa are like fairyland for the first few weeks of cold weather after the rains.

At the foot of the hills is Kahus, an old military station of German days, with a high watch-tower commanding an extensive view over the wide plains around Kalkfontein. Having been unable to make any breakfast that morning, we had a very good meal at a Kalkfontein hotel.

The road south leaves the railway altogether at Kalkfontein, for the train goes round two sides of a triangle.

For the next thirty-eight miles, as far as the village of Warmbad, the way is known as the best road in the Protectorate. We thought it could indeed compare favourably with any country road in the Union, though to European minds, accustomed to good macadam, that might not mean much!

Along this stretch there was not a gate, bump, slope, sluit, or police trap: who would not race along it? But in spite of Lizzie's pace we found time to admire the great patches of purple freesias that bordered the road, and the vast unbroken prairies of waving silver grass beyond, whose oil-containing seed is so good for fattening stock.

Leaving Warmbad in its sleepy hollow, we climbed, and travelled across high, windswept, undulating country for a time, and then dipped down into sandy vleis, starred thickly with low-growing daisies, their yellow-eyed white faces all happily turned to the sun. Lizzie's second gear hummed a long song through

these valleys until we came out again on the flat plains surrounded by mountains through the heart of which flows the Orange River.

We reached the ferry of the river at dusk, so had to camp and wait until morning to be taken across. Lizzie was manœuvred down a sheer bank on to a pontoon, which punted her across the beautiful deep water, glittering clear as crystal on a lovely sunlit morning. How shall I describe Goodhouse, as the ferry is called? Hemmed in by the grim, bare mountains, the deep stream of the river winds through a land of rock, sand, and barrenness, relieved with startling unexpectedness at this point by the man-made oasis of Goodhouse. Here the river is fringed with feathery willows and orchards of five thousand orange trees, turning golden with fruit when we saw them. Here are the three or four homesteads of the estate, the pumping station, and the Kaffir huts, which all give a feeling of life and friendliness in sharp contrast to the lonely, haughty mountains around. The manager of the estate insisted on giving us breakfast in typically hospitable South African fashion.

Once across the Orange River, we were, of course, back in the Union. From Goodhouse the going became grim. We climbed 1800 feet of sand in about twelve miles. But Lizzie behaved splendidly. Over the crest of that height, we dipped down again, and now found ourselves running through the plains and bleak hills of Namaqualand. The scenery was drab and grey and brown, except where the huge rocks glittered with mica winking wickedly like diamonds asking to be picked up. And big boulders strewn around made us think that a tribe of untidy baby giants had omitted to put away their playthings.

When you know that this strip of South Africa is favoured with between one and two inches of rain a year, you will not think it surprising that in a whole long day's driving we met only one old native and a couple of donkeys. Had Lizzie broken down in that wasteland, we might have waited weeks before being rescued. Not many high-powered cars had done this trip in those days, and our Lizzie was the very first of her particular make ever to do the journey. With it she broke into headlines of print in Cape Town!

We were glad to come across life again at the small dorps of O'okiep and Springbok, where we noticed the old copper-smelting works. After Springbok there is a very abrupt hill on which Lizzie stuck. We gave her two new sparking-plugs and a fill of petrol—which we had foolishly allowed to run low—and also off-loaded some kit to lighten her weight. Then she consented to restart. Having carried up the kit piecemeal, we felt very short of breath and as dry as the landscape around us, so we lunched on that hilltop.

I have often wondered why South Africa could not have found some more suitable place than a dreary little mining settlement on the edge of beyond on which to bestow the name of her beautiful national emblem, the springbok! It would be nice if, when the "Springboks" of the Eighth Army and other Dominion forces return home, their own country were to name some really beautiful spot (and there are many such) in South Africa "Springbok", in honour of her fighting sons. It might be some new settlement for returned soldiers, which would be a memorial to their comrades who died. It might be some charming old dorp renamed.

After lunch we spent the afternoon careering up and down—at any rate down—big mountains, and as the roads were comparatively smooth and all dips properly paved with cement we made good going until Lizzie again stuck on a hill just outside Bowiesdorp, a village miles from a railway or anywhere. But we did not blush for Lizzie, for we heard that many cars jib at this formidable mountain slope, and we forgave her because she deigned to start again just before we had to offload the kit.

Sunset found us in the little dorp of Kamies Kroon. The very name was like a lullaby, and we slept gently in hotel beds that night.

We were now in the region of the diamond fields around Port Nolloth and down the coast. We felt that anyone we met might be an illicit diamond-buyer, or perhaps a detective on the trail of such. It was here we heard the yarn of how one rogue got safely away with some fine stones for which he had paid some native but half a crown apiece. Knowing he was suspect, this buyer thought of a very cute place in which to hide his gems. When the I.D.B. detectives cornered him he was therefore able to remain quite calm, to the surprise of his captors.

"Search me?" he said nonchalantly. "Of course you can—— Have a cigarette." The flummoxed detective accepted a weed, and also the match struck and proffered by his victim, who, having also lit up, replaced the cigarette-case in his pocket, carelessly threw the large matchbox on the table, and announced himself ready to be searched. The police looked through every crease, cranny, and pocket of the man's hair, clothes, socks, and boots, and found nothing. They examined his cigarette-case and restored it to him as innocent. Then, disappointed, they allowed him to dress again, pocket his matches, and depart in peace. Who would have thought of looking in the matchbox lying brazenly on the table before them all?

We experienced a funny incident ourselves in Namaqualand. We were in a grocery store one morning replenishing the chop-box. It was just like every other up-country store in South Africa, and as these places never fail to be intriguing, we looked around with interest. Saddlery, harness, reims, clusters of biltong, and strings of pots and pans hung from the varnished wood ceiling; the shelves were crammed with stacks of khaki drill clothing, canned goods, and bales of cheap prints; and on the counters boots, cheeses, bars of home-made Boer soap, jackal-skins, and classic pelts rubbed shoulders with each other. Having taken it all in once more, I gazed through the doorway at the glare outside, and saw a magnificent, glittering car purr up to the shop. A moment later a slip-slop of veldschoen came up the steps and there entered a typical backvelder. His floppy hat was, as usual, old and greasy; his blue dungarees were patched with khaki and his khaki shirt with blue, while his face, hands, and sockless ankles were far from clean. He bought a span of tobacco, chatted in Afrikaans with the storekeeper for a few minutes, gulped down the ubiquitous cup of tea handed him across the counter, sucked his walrus moustache, wiping it after with the back of his hand, and with a casual "So long" stalked out of the store and drove away.

Unable to understand the incongruity of the expensive car and its tattered owner, James asked the storekeeper who his late customer might be—though to be sure he was really no business of ours.

"Oh, he had a farm out here." The storekeeper jerked a fat thumb over his shoulder.

Still puzzled, James said: "Was it a good farm?" Farms in Namaqualand are not money-making Edens as a rule.

"Vraatig! Ya!" said the storekeeper enthusiastically; then added, "His place has yielded a small fortune in diamonds!"

And so the new-rich ex-farmer, while continuing to wear his ancient farm clothes because he had never known any other, had, like a child, indulged in a bright new toy of a splendid car. In this he rode into "Town", his nearest dorp, once or twice a week to buy himself sixpence worth of the cheapest tobacco, to which he had always been accustomed. Probably had you visited his farm you would have found a homestead that was no more than an ugly blot on an ugly landscape of thorn and sand—a tin-roofed, mud-walled shack, little better than all the temporary shacks and shanties of the diamond claims around it.

In this country you can never judge a man's antecedents or his bank balance by his appearance or his manners, for the first thing everyone here invariably does with his first fistful of ready cash is to buy a large car, even before he thinks of getting a toothbrush or a cake of soap.

How shabby our new Lizzie looked after that diamond man's lovely limousine! However, James's hat was a little less ancient than his, so I tried to count my blessings and refrain from visualizing a find of diamonds on Barenklau, as we reloaded our humble lorry preparatory to continuing on our way to Cape Town.

As we hurtled down a steep hill beyond Kamies Kroon we discovered Lizzie's brake-band was burnt out. Fortunately there were no more stiff declines, and we came upon country of long gradual slopes. Here Lizzie unaccountably developed into what the Irish would call a "bold bad girl". Creeping paralysis attacked her, and we began to crawl along. So little power did she possess that we groaned up the gentlest rises in second, and had to stop every two miles to soothe her boiling rage with cold water for the radiator. A six-wheeler railway lorry, this backveld's only connection with the distant line, came thundering along, and the two men aboard kindly offered assistance, which we gladly accepted. They got at Lizzie's innards with a hammer for about ten minutes, and then said, "She'll go now."

She did too, though it took us two hours to cover the remaining seven miles to Bitterfontein. The water at Bitterfontein is indeed bitter, and the dorp deserves its name, as perhaps does the water at the elegantly named dorp of Stinkfontein, close by! That, at any rate, was one reason why we had to do the hotel bar a good turn while the car's brake was being repaired. She was also fitted with new platinum points, and a third new plug, and was given a generous drink of oil.

Despite this treatment, Lizzie deceived us. She went spinning along the fifty miles between Bitterfontein and Van Rhyn's Dorp, and made us fondly imagine our troubles were over. The fact of the matter was that the road here is good, and even vehicles used in Mother Shipton's days might have travelled it without their horses. Therefore it wasn't until we ploughed into sand beyond Van Rhyn's Dorp next morning (after having camped for the night in a stone quarry!) and could not pull out that we realized the lorry was still ailing, though, with all the perversity of her sex, she would not divulge her complaint. I took the wheel, while the two men shoved. There are a few occasions when it is preferable not to be a man. Once Lizzie moved, I kept her going until a really hard road was reached, despite the brotherly remarks and tender words which came from the two sprinting males behind.

Twelve miles out of Clanwilliam, the next town after Van Rhyn's Dorp, the road meets the Olifants River, and runs along it into that pretty dorp which lies in a big orange-growing district. We spent a whole day in Clanwilliam, thoroughly overhauling the lorry, before facing Grey's Pass over the mountains north of Cape Town. We found that a piston-ring had seized. This was righted, and Lizzie seemed once more her own dear self.

We left Clanwilliam that evening, and travelled all night while the Klein Baas slept peacefully amongst the luggage. The road still followed the Olifants River, sometimes suspended high above the river bed, and again swooping down to the edge of the pretty rush-fringed pools and streams left by the previous season's rains. Large vineyards spread over the mountain slopes, and the little hamlet of Citrusdal, at the foot of the pass, lay amid neat orange orchards, with its roads bordered by feathery Port Jackson willows. Although still far from a railway line, we were now in a well-watered district of lovely farms.

Grey's Pass is sheer and rugged, with hairpin bends and steep drops, and

we were thankful for the repaired foot-brake when descending through the darkness that night. We had been warned not to try the Pass at night, but we badly wanted to arrive in Cape Town early the next morning!

On reaching the plains again we passed through the pleasant farming districts of Piquetberg and Malmesbury, where broad ploughed lands lay like big fawn handkerchiefs spread on the ground, awaiting the rains still delayed in this district, and troops of grunting black pigs fed on last year's stubble.

Between Malmesbury and Cape Town the road is very corrugated, and our bones got a good rattling as Lizzie jikkered along those forty miles. Those who have travelled over French pavé will know the feeling.

But we forgot our troubles and discomfort when we saw the dawn light strike Table Mountain, and reveal the sea mists swathed round the city's towering old guardian. Remembering the vogue for coloured linen, Table Mountain had affected an amber and rose tinted tablecloth that morning. Dawn over Table Mountain has to be seen to be believed. It is sublime.

Across Salt River Bridge we entered the outskirts of the city, winding our way through streets of small shops, and the municipal arrangements apparently indispensable to the running of a big town anywhere on the globe.

How good it was to reach our hotel! To be in civilization again after six unbroken years on the veld! To eat food I had not cooked; to bathe in a full-length bath instead of a tin tub; and, joy of joys, have my hair done properly once more!

The Klein Baas, who had never seen a staircase in his young life before, spent contented hours wonderingly walking up and down the hotel stairway, or ecstatic spells with his new pal the lift-boy, shooting skyward or descending with a whiz to the basement. If the stairs were amazing, the lift was of fairy conception!

A cold douche descended on all our thrills on the afternoon we saw my brother sail for England. As the big grey Union Castle liner glided out of a glassy harbour, and we rushed to the end of the pier to give our handkerchiefs a few last flaps, an unutterable longing made the eyes smart. The people on that ship were going to England!—to emerald greenery and coolness and old friends while we must return across the Namaqualand Desert to a Kalahari farm! The lucky devils! As the myriad paper ribbons which for a last kaleidoscopic moment so lightly bound those left behind on the quay to those on board snapped, we swallowed large lumps in our throats. But it was a passing qualm, more for my brother than anything else. We loved our Kalahari farm, our own place.

We could only afford to stay three days in Cape Town in all, so after seeing my brother sail, we once more attended to our commissariat, oil, petrol, and water supplies, and started homewards on the return 900 miles northward.

Our return trip was more hectic than the first journey, for we no longer had a second man to help push Lizzie through the sandy places. After leaving Goodhouse I happened to be driving, and all went well until we left the hills and ran down into those daisy-grown vleis again. Then I found myself negotiating a sharp turn with a huge rock, half buried in the deep sand, right in the track. Rather than bounce sky-high off the rock, I ploughed into the sand, hoping to pull through. But Lizzie stuck. James did not strafe me; he was just overwhelmingly, tactlessly tactful as only a man knows how to be.

"You'd better let me drive her here," quoth he, "because I think I understand her better than you do." Was there ever a man who did not think he understood the Lizzies, as well as the Janes and Daphnes, of the world? We deflated the tyres, so as to run more easily over the sand, and then I meekly handed over the wheel when we had struggled out of that sandy mistake. Can

I be blamed if I admit to a bit of unholy exultation when he-who-understood-her dived into the sand twice within the next half-hour?

We thought it was for keeps the last time, because although we dug, jacked and backed, jammed, rammed, and dammed planks and wire-netting under and behind the driving-wheel, we could not gain an inch. And all the time South Africa's beautiful sunshine beat fiercely down on the backs of our necks.

We sat down on the roadside to have a good drink about it. Meantime Lizzie cooled off too, with the result that a few minutes later, after spraying a shower of fine sand into my face as she kicked herself free, she and James loped off, and kept going till they reached good ground. So I picked up the planks, wire netting, and the spade, and walked half a mile homeward, getting my shoes full of sand. I felt as if I had swallowed all South Africa.

We took on a fresh supply of petrol, beer, and water at Warmbad, and went on to spend the night at Kalkfontein. Next morning we set out again after breakfast, and buzzed along nicely until things began to happen. With feminine vindictiveness Lizzie reminded us of her existence, first with a puncture, and then, half an hour later, by the complete burning-out of her clutch-band.

Woe were we! There we were planted, thirty miles out of Kalkfontein, some 120 miles short of Keetmanshoop, and ten miles from the nearest farmhouse (as it turned out when the distance had been duly paced out by James). That farm produced donkeys about 7 p.m., and we were towed funereally back to Kalkfontein, arriving there petrified with a winter night's cold at 2 a.m. However warm the days in these arid regions, the nights during the cold weather are always bitter.

Lizzie's repairs were finished by lunch-time the next day, so after that meal we set out again, and drove all through the afternoon and evening, stopping only for a picnic supper. But although we should have reached Keetmanshoop about 10 p.m., we again rolled up at 2 a.m. This time we had lost our way in the dark. It is marvellous what intricate patterns you can weave about the empty veld when there is an entire absence of signs, human habitations, or other motorists, and you possess only sketchy road maps of half-charted regions.

We slept for two days in Keetmanshoop with scarcely a break! Then we did the last lap to Mariental. It was good to get back there. Half the dorp had waved us off when we left, vowing, "You'll never do it!" So we returned triumphant. Our desire to win the challenge had been the one thing which had enabled us to resist the sneaking temptation which had gripped us in Cape Town: to rail Lizzie home, and return by mail ourselves.

There remained only the thirty familiar miles out to Barenklau. Although the trip had been a comic experience, and a fortnight's absence from home a great treat, we both actually murmured "Thank Heaven!" when we finally reached Barenklau. As we swung into the private road all the windows of the house flashed crimson in the sunset. We thought for one hideous moment that the place was alight.

Although the lorry had played us nasty tricks, we patted her on the bonnet for the fact that in all that 1800 miles (not to mention the odd sixty miles to and from Mariental, and the running about in Cape Town) she indulged in only one puncture. This was because the two rear wheels were fitted with six-ply extra heavy tyres, and the two front wheels, while being shod with ordinary balloons, were protected by a slipped-on covering of two old tyres with their steel rims removed. We pass on the tip for what it is worth, for I think motorists in South Africa would find it useful should they venture forth on the somewhat rough roads in the more unknown parts of the country. And of course, don't

ever go a yard on such a trip without a length of wire netting, a spade or two, and some stout planks. If you don't stick in sand, you may find them equally useful when you are wallowing in the slime of a brak pan!

Shortly after our return from Cape Town we joyfully jumped at an invitation to visit some friends on a farm in the district of South-West Africa's wonderful artesian springs, known as the Aub Valley, which lies about fifty miles east of Barenklau.

For this we first drove into Mariental to join a party of others also going out to the Aub. A week-end on the Kalahari sounds dry as dust, but it was the exact opposite, and we found we had not seen so much water for a long time (barring the ocean at Cape Town).

Thanks to the laws of compensation, Nature often provides great wealth of minerals in desert places. It might be wondered why God made the bleak Aub district as it appears on the surface, if He did not put something worth while, besides water, which is admittedly precious, under the ground. Another example of such wealth are the nitrate mines of the Chilean deserts. I mention these because nitrate of soda deposits have been found in the Aub Valley, though to what extent is not yet known.

Until just before the First World War, the Aub Valley was a dry, desolate river-bed, running north and south down the eastern side of German South-West Africa, just where the Kalahari Desert really begins.

Then this no-man's-land was suspected by the Germans of containing coal, and boring operations were undertaken. At a depth of some four hundred feet the drillers struck a surprise. They found no coal, but, without warning, a forceful gush of strong water *rose to the surface* and poured forth at the rate of a million gallons a day! It was amazing. The first upshooting jet of water blew the whole big drilling machine almost to bits. Such a supply of water in such a place was truly staggering. Other holes, properly managed, were drilled with similar results. The waters were controlled, lands were levelled, and irrigation started. Literally, the desert blossomed in the Aub Valley.

Today the district is divided into 6000 to 10,000 hectare farms, each having at least one splendid water supply. There are many farms in more civilized parts of southern Africa which cannot boast one million gallons of water a day.

Mariental is railhead for the Aub Valley. After joining up with friends there, and leaving the dorp about 3 p.m. one Saturday afternoon, two car-loads of us set out eastward, and after travelling through the bare stony kopjes and the mimosa-grown sluit, and over the earth dam, we traversed the ten-mile pan and then veered to the left, in the opposite direction to Barenklau. We crossed another sluit and climbed to higher veld, grown with small bush. This veld made one of the huge ranches of South-West, for the whole 50,000-hectare farm here belonged to one man.

Our road turned due east again, with only two gates to negotiate. Later, we drew up at a farmhouse which runs a small bar for travellers, about twenty-five miles out of Mariental. It had been a dusty drive, and the beer was heavenly.

After leaving this farm we passed for about two miles under the lacy shade of a long line of Kameelboom. Then the road became terrible, and we joggled our way over limestone for many miles, until descending into the very sandy place known as Hofmeyer. This is a small settlement forty miles from railhead, and is the first spot where the artesian waters are to be seen. The whole area is delightfully wooded by giant kameelboom, which struck us as a miracle in a district boasting only six inches of rainfall a year—with luck.

A little beyond Hofmeyer we passed close under a marble quarry where

gravestones are made! From this part also comes the pale-grey stone from which many of the district's houses are built. We also passed a police patrol mounted on camels. These lumbering beasts have been found much more suitable for police work here than the horses which operate in our own region.

A few miles further we entered the bed of the Aub Valley itself, and followed the wide ribbon of silver sand into Stamprietfontein, the main settlement here. As well as being worthy of its watery name, it boasts a fine grey-stone school, a hostel, police station, post office, stores, etc., and is well served by railway motor lorries. It is not so remote from civilization as it sounds. The place is a real oasis, for there are fields and pretty gardens, one of which has a long row of date-bearing palms. But Africa often gives generously with one hand and takes back with the other: the people of Stamprietfontein boast that their gardens would be finer if the soil were less brak. For all its fine water, this place might have better soil.

Five miles beyond Stamprietfontein we reached the well-watered farm to which we had been invited, the house of which was appropriately named "The Ark".

To the back of the house stretched the sandveld where grazed the merino sheep and karakuls—the producers of Persian lamb—so largely farmed in this district; while below in the pleasant valley of the dry river-bed lay the irrigated areas, with gardens, mealie lands, lines of blue gums as windbreaks, and wheat-lands.

The landscape was delightfully free of the long-legged aluminium-coloured windmills which mar such scenes in other parts. Here the water needed suppressing! And it must be good water too, for it produced enormous pumpkins, giant melons, lucerne of fine big leaf, and all manner of vegetables and fruits, including carrots. Of these, one farm rails many dozen bags a week to Luderitzbucht diamond fields, where this vegetable, with its Vitamin A content, is necessary for the good health of the miners. "We have carrots and carats," as the miner said!

The farm we were on was one of those happy mixed farms where the lucerne feeds the cows, whose milk feeds the pigs and poultry, who manure the land, and so on, like the house that Jack built.

After a large and typically South African supper of green mealies, joints of mutton, boiled rice and potatoes, grilled tomatoes, tripe and onions, and chilled cantaloup, we danced on the stoep to the gramophone until midnight. Then when the full moon was at its brightest we all jumped into bathing costumes and ran down to the enormous cement dam in the valley to bathe. A chill wind blew in off the desert, but the underground water in which we sported was really hot! To try and float under the roaring stream, which shot like a broadside from a six-inch valve, felt like being blown from a cannon, and try as we would to remain stationary we were always driven across the dam by the force of the inflowing water.

On Sunday we drove to other farms and took photographs of the waters. We also bathed again in another reservoir, which was 150 feet in length and made an ideal swimming-bath, and had a most successful game of water-polo with wild sama melons picked off the veld!

Sunday night found us driving back to Mariental. Scurrying clouds hid the moon, and in the uncertain light we lost our way, so did not arrive back until after midnight. We were tired—but it had been a swimmingly grand weekend, in a place which you would imagine to be very dry indeed.

The Aub Valley represents irrigation on a big scale. In other schemes there is the lurking danger that water may fail if the dammed-up catchment area has not been regularly fed by rain or river water, but the beauty of the Aub scheme seems to be an inexhaustible supply of water.

There are many theories about the phenomenal waters of the Aub. One says that there is an underground river or lake here, fed from the Zambesi.

In the clear, sparkling air of this high country of South-West you can see over vast distances. It is easy to see what it is like on the surface. But this surface has as yet scarcely been scratched for what may lie hidden underneath. Minerals, precious stones, and water must exist in even larger quantities than is now known. Windhoek, Warmbad, Omaruru, and Gobabis are other places which have hot springs like the Aub Valley.

Those romantic items gold and gems first put the Union on the map. Perhaps these same things will do just that for South-West Africa too. Ask any old prospector what he thinks of the mineral wealth of this great district, 322,450 square miles in extent (or about six times the size of England), and he will perhaps shrug, perhaps offer great expectations. It is all just a matter of personal opinion still. Everyone knows that the diamonds already found at Luderitz and Port Nolloth were surface stones found in pockets of sand. One prospector told me you could go out before breakfast and fill a jam-jar, but although you may put salt on that statement, the stones certainly were plentiful on the surface. Yes, but what lies below?

One day when our dorp doctor was driving out from Mariental to a social visit with us a certain stone by the wayside attracted him as he bucketed along. Every South African is instinctively a bit of a geologist. He got out, picked up the piece of rock, and brought it with him.

"Can I have a hammer?" was his greeting, on arrival.

We cracked the stone in two, and behold there was a line of colour across it! It must be copper, we said, avoiding each other's eyes. That four-lettered word of the Rand is a maggot in everyone's brain on the rim of Nowhere-at-all!

We sent the stone to Cape Town, and meanwhile we pegged and registered claims on the farm where the stone had been found. The farmer, of course, did the same, though, as owner of the farm, the house and its immediate surroundings would always be his to dig, sell, or keep intact. As we pegged, a young moon smiled down, and the bright African stars watched, and winked slyly at each other.

While awaiting the Cape Town verdict I pored over catalogues of beautiful clothes. The doctor agreed a first-class sea voyage somewhere would do us all good. James said, "Don't be silly," but murmured that Barenklau would be grand with another three boreholes, more stock, and perhaps 500 citrus trees at the western end where the soil was deep and good. He thought grapefruit would pay well. Oh yes! James was dreaming dreams too!

The report from Cape Town told us that our rock would yield 1 dwt. of gold—yes, gold!—per ton on the surface. Now it needs 4 dwt. on the surface to be payable, and 8 dwt. in deep mining. Money was tight all round just then. The surface mining was proved uneconomic, and no one had the cash for deeper investigation. So our "gold mine" became a cause for local hilarity.

But what about the well-known theory that the Rand Reef emerges again far westward of the Transvaal—in South-West Africa, in fact? Some day, someone may laugh on the other side of the face.

CHAPTER XIII

THIS BOY CAME TO US ON THE FARM IN THE SAME WAY AS DID GLADSTONE, Disraeli, Music, Lightning, and the other farmhands. He appeared one day

from out of the blue, presenting himself at the foot of the stoep steps where they ed down from the kitchen door to the dustbin on the right of them and the rainwater-butt on the left.

Susannah, the latest Herrero girl, said there was a boy outside wanting work; would the Missus come and see him? The Missus came out on to the back stoep, and saw below her a squat-figured Hottentot. When he took off his sweat-stained trilby, trimmed with a weary ostrich plume as usual, his hair showed in tight black curls peppered over his skull like the ghanna bushes evenly spaced over the veld of his native land. The ugliness of his shiny, ebony face, fringed with greying bristles, was relieved only by the sparkling good humour of his black-brown eyes. The Missus liked his eyes. She felt she could at any time safely entrust the Klein Baas, aged eight, to the care of a boy with those eyes. Later the Baas roared with laughter when he realized that she had engaged this boy to work on the farm for this reason.

The boy's leanness showed in the deep "salt cellars" below his open, frayed collar, and his ribs could be seen through the long slits in his ancient khaki shirt. But the dark brown arms below the rolled-up sleeves looked wiry, and so did his legs, which were visible for most of their length below the knees, where his trousers ended in a serrated fringe bitten by time and hard usage. Apparently they had once been grey flannels, inherited, like his hat and his shirt, from some long-previous baas. His feet, of course, were bare.

The Missus asked the boy his name. She expected another July or June, Sixpence, or Biscuit. But he was called Jacob. She asked him if he could do washing. He wasn't enthusiastic about this, but modestly said he could do everything in exchange for half a sack of flour, three rolls of tobacco, four pounds each of sugar, and coffee, two sheep (or goats), fifteen shillings, and a pontok per month. He asked rather a lot, but so it was agreed, for the farm needed an odd-job man.

Five minutes later Jacob strode off to the big circular reservoir carrying a zinc tub in either hand and a bundle of dirty linen and two mammoth bars of blue mottled washing-soap balanced on his kop. And the Klein Baas trotted, chatting in Afrikaans, behind him, as he so often did from this day forth, like the lamb following its beloved Mary. As Jacob departed, the Missus intercepted the grin which passed in a flash of white teeth between the much-married Susannah and this new henchman, and sternly suggested that the former should immediately come and help strip the old covers from the living-room furniture, for which the new covers had just arrived from Cape Town. Susannah agreed with alacrity, knowing that all such discarded "softs" were her rightful perquisite. And this stuff was particularly desirable, being of rainbow stripes.

All that day Jacob's horny hands scrubbed the family's clothes from thin places into holes, and completed the good work by spiking each garment on to the convenient thorns of adjacent gáv bushes, where they fluttered to tatters in the bleaching sunshine. And when evening came he ripped everything off the bushes, and brought in the washing, and the tubs, and the pieces of soap: all except one lovely tea-cloth, which was eaten that night by Frau Hitler, the scrub cow, so called because she looked like no one on this earth. Jacob patiently explained his theory that moonlight removed tea-stains, though it was obvious his theory was not so effective as Frau Hitler, who removed the entire tea-cloth.

That evening the missus told the baas that the new boy was a disgrace to look at, and must be given some boots and new clothes. The baas promised to look out some of his old duds. But he might have spared himself. For morning dawned with a rainbow on the back stoep, and it was evident that Jacob had, like Joseph of old, a coat of many colours. Susannah must have sat half the night cobbling to create for Jacob the coon-striped trousers and seven-coloured shirt

that had been our chair-covers but yesterday. Human hearts, and their capacity for making triangles, are the same the world over.

And were those multi-coloured little objects, fluttering around the distant pontoks, flowers from the garden run amok; were they liver-spots before the eyes; or were they really Susannah's eight doorsteps jazzing at play in the bright sunshine? What remained of the striped crotone after clothing nine people was wound in a new and vastly becoming doek around Susannah's head.

Some days later Jacob was put to irrigating the garden, assisted by the Klein Baas. The latter's enthusiasm must have flagged in the heat, for he soon returned to the cool of the homestead. And Jacob too must have wearied, since an hour later he was discovered sound asleep beneath the shade of the grape trellis, while the precious water ran to waste where nothing was intended to grow. Gently toed awake by the missus, Jacob staggered to his feet, and looked at the sun.

"Missus," quoth he, "it is just after eleven o'clock."

"But, Jacob! Look how the water is all gone, and the dam is quite dry, and there is no wind to bring more water," wailed the missus.

Jacob grinned, and without a word climbed the rungs which led up the tower of the grey steel wind-pump. The missus saw him purse his lips, but as he was far above her, and the wind-pump stood to leeward, she heard no sound. Her repeated calls failed to dislodge the boy from his dizzy perch, until, ten minutes later, the great wheel of the mill started to turn lazily. Then, after waiting a minute longer to watch it increase its speed, as a sudden little breeze began to sing across the veld in the way breezes have in this open country, Jacob consented to descend.

"See, missus. I whistle for the wind, and it comes. Now the dam will soon be full with more water, and I can water the garden again!" he promised.

In the months that followed, Jacob showed the Klein Baas many things: how to make and mould little animals out of clay, to fashion bows and arrows, to spoor the meerkats, lizards, and creatures of the veld, to sew the skins of dassies with reims into warm karosses. He showed how the blossom and baby fruit and ripened lemons could all be seen together on one tree, and told him why the pretty peach-blossoms must not be picked. And all the time he was laundering, carrying water, hewing wood, gardening, milking goats and Frau Hitler (when available), and doing housework. But he was never promoted to the heights of cooking, for the missus had a hunch that his culinary methods would surely be out of the Beeton way. Yet the day came when Jacob was suddenly raised to the most responsible post on the farm. Two shepherds had gone sick, and in desperation the baas said: "Well, Jacob must herd the ewes and lambs!"

Jacob was delighted, transfigured, uplifted. This was man's work at last. This was work he loved, work to which he had been born on the sheep farms of the Great Karroo, had we but known it, for, native-like, he had never offered us this information.

But, alas! That night the flock of ewes and lambs returned one short. The missus counted them in while the baas dealt with the other flocks.

"Five hundred and ninety-nine," the missus said. "And it should be six hundred." Jacob shook his kop and sought an explanation. He said: "The lambs run into the kraal five together, and six, and the ewes they run back and forward looking for their lambs. And the dust flies into the eyes of the one who counts. I think all the sheep are here tonight."

But though doubting herself, the missus stuck to her count. So the boy rather reluctantly agreed to return to his grazing-grounds and search for the missing creature, as soon as he had settled the flock. It was a revelation watching him bed the flock. With a bunch of limp lambs held by the forefeet in each

upraised hand he stalked among the frantic, milling ewes, yielding up a youngster here and there, as he found for each its own parent.

"How do you know where each belongs?" the missus asked.

"Every sheep is different, missus," Jacob explained. "Just like all people are different." And then the missus realized he must have spent his day on the veld studying the faces of his charges.

When the bleating and the dust in the kraal died down Jacob strode off into the purpling dusk of the veld, in search of the missing ewe or lamb—he knew not which, if either.

An hour later he returned, huddled forward with a weight upon his shoulder. The missus joined him at the kraal, pleased that her count was justified, but sorry for the willing boy's extra work. For the shepherd's day was not yet finished. In a separate kraal lived the hansi lambs: orphans, or babies of mothers who could not or would not feed them. For these there were teat-crowned Worcester saucc bottles filled with milk. It was often a delight to the Klein Baas to hold a bottle and pull against a lamb's vigorous sucking.

One morning before starting out on the veld with his flock Jacob reported a snake in the garden, and fell on his knees to start his tracking.

"See, Klein Baas! It is a big slang, and it has gone this way. Here a spike of grass is bent. Here he has pushed the sand aside in his going," he declared, though the signs were perceptible to no one except him who knew how to see them.

"And here, this leaf is broken where he passed over it lying on the flat rock, and this fallen twig is pressed in the sand." And so he trailed the spoor to a far corner of the garden, where he leapt upon the reptile and grabbed its tail as it sought refuge below ground. With heels dug into the sand Jacob held the tail till the skin could be seen cracking under the pull, while he loudly demanded boiling water. Susannah, who had accompanied the trailing party, tore back to the homestead for the kettle off the range, and the baas raced for his rifle. The boiling water poured down the hole caused the snake to let go so suddenly the root to which it must have been holding that Jacob sat down with a thud. The Klein Baas laughed to see such sport as the snake hurtled into the air, and the big baas shot it as if practising at clay pigeons.

While these doings endeared Jacob to the family, he was popular too with the inhabitants of the farm pontoks. On still nights his singing and his banjo-strumming drifted across to the homestead, mixed with the delicious smell of Kaffir coffee. The Klein Baas, too, had a banjo, for Jacob had made him one just like his own: it consisted of an empty one-gallon paraffin tin with wild cat-gut stretched from end to end.

But it was the loss of the Klein Baas on the veld that made Jacob a hero to everyone.

For his ninth birthday the Klein Baas had acquired an air-gun, presented to him by his father, in spite of his mother's misgivings. For some days he proudly potted at small birds around the garden, his bag totalling one little wild canary, at whose death the missus was, to his mind, most inexplicably sorrowful. Sometimes, too, he hit outraged and squawking Leghorns on the tail, and must have been inspired by these successes to hunt farther afield, as Father did when he strode forth with his rifle after gemsbok, or springbok, or ostrich, for the pot.

Growing apprehensive, the missus searched the garden and nearer veld throughout the afternoon, hoping the child would come in at tea-time. But he stayed away. After tea, as the shadows quickly lengthened, and night fell almost as quickly as the dropping of a box-lid over Africa, the missus felt panicky. The flocks returned, and the baas came in from his work on the lands of an outlying

camp. In that lonely district three farmhouses lay seven miles away to the north, south, and west. To the east stretched the Kalahari Desert. And from there a sharp wind was whistling, threatening one of those blinding sand-storms which can transform the face of the veld, burying landmarks and all living things that are unprotected.

The alarm went round, and, armed with knobkerries and lanterns, the natives scattered to begin the search. Taking a light and a rifle, the baas strode off alone, after telling the missus not to worry, and to stay quietly in the homestead with the weeping Susannah. But the frantic missus joined the faithful Jacob, and, with him leading the way, started off eastward to the desert.

Greatly daring, Jacob took her hand to help her along against the rushing ground wind. For a while, as they ploughed along, they kept their mouths closed to keep the flying sand from out of their teeth. Then, after long thinking, Jacob offered comfort.

"Missus, this morning the Klein Baas asked me if I had seen any lion out by the broken dam this way."

Lion! The missus' heart stood still. But this wasn't really lion country. Only sometimes, when they had been known to stray west from the desert, were lion seen here. Surely not lion! No. Not that!

But Jacob spoke again, calmly.

"I think we must search by the broken dam, missus."

They had staggered along for about two miles, which seemed like twenty to the poor missus, when through the darkness and the ochre gloom of the scudding sand the old earthworks which had once dammed up the waters of the vlei, where herds of game now came for their salt-lick, loomed before their straining eyes.

Jacob dropped to his knees in search of spoor, as was ever his way. But even his stout heart must have sunk when he saw how wind and the shifting sand had obliterated all tracks. Yet ten minutes' patient crawling around brought its reward. With a sort of war-whoop he leapt upon a small blue-and-white-striped object hitched taut by the wind in a thorn bush. With momentary childish delight he recalled for the missus the Klein Baas's habit of removing his shoes and socks at every opportunity and losing them, always preferring to go bare-foot like the native piccanins, until his little feet, like theirs, were tough and veld-hardened. The missus moaned when she saw the small sock she had knitted; such a pathetic little bit of the child, and all she would ever see again, she felt.

But Jacob was excitedly explaining his plan of action. They must walk in widening circles away from the broken dam, as people always walk when they are lost.

The missus wanted to run in all directions, searching wildly, but the boy held her hand firmly now, and led her inch by inch in ever-widening rings. How he kept the arcs of his movement so perfect can only be attributed to that instinct which means life itself to inhabitants of primitive countries, and which guides all lost animals safely back to their homes. Jacob's circular tours must have been accurate to a hair's breadth, even when the circles widened to a mile in radius, and their centre at the broken dam was hidden by distance and darkness. Else he never would have stumbled upon the Klein Baas as he did.

The child lay huddled, unconscious, and already half buried by sand, under the spreading, cedar-like arms of a kameelboom. The missus was quite sure he was dead, and tried to carry him home herself. But in which direction lay the way home? She, too, was distraught and lost. But Jacob knew there was no time to waste in foolishness. He firmly took the child out of the missus' arms and set off in a bee-line for the homestead.

Happily, a Spartan upbringing on the veld made light of the adventure

in the Klein Baas' mind, and he quickly forgot the horror of his lion-hunt, and bewailed only the loss of his air-gun. But he agreed readily when Jacob said to him:

"Klein Baas, when you get another gun, and go hunting, you must take with you a good tracker, like me. All the white hunters take with them a good tracker."

And the missus, hearing this, and seeing the twinkle in Jacob's dark eyes, and knowing how he could spoor snakes, lost sheep, and everything else, felt that the Klein Baas would be safe on the veld for evermore.

One day James and I had a tiff, and my indignant partner ended it by throwing his rifle into the Lizzie and driving off into the wintry cool of the veld to bang off his feelings should he meet a target. While he was gone, our neighbour from seven miles southward happened along, feeling very sore because a leopard, which, like all Boers, he spoke of as a "tiger", had killed some of his sheep the previous night, and scattered some of his flock. Had any of his straying sheep come our way? I said I had not seen any, comforted him with coffee, and saw him ride off elsewhere in his search. So a leopard—perhaps several leopards—was in our vicinity! How thrilling! We had had straying sheep devoured by Kalahari wolves, and jackals, before this, but as yet no wild creature had attacked our flocks in the kraals. By the time James returned home at mid-day my wrath had evaporated, and I excitedly told him we might be called upon by a "tiger". He hoped it would keep away from Barenklau.

In the evening James suddenly remembered he had heard of there being a dance in the dorp that night, and unexpectedly announced his intention of driving in to it, there and then. I confess I was dismayed. I could not accompany him, as the Klein Baas was already asleep.

The baas took the faithful Gladstone with him to the dorp, for it is quite customary in South Africa to take a native along on such trips, to wait on one and run messages.

Being quite alone in the house when night closed down, relieved only by a glimmer of stars above, it was inevitable that my thoughts should revert to the leopard. I hoped most sincerely again that he would not visit Barenklau. But I pulled myself together, and after a supper of bread and jam and tea I put an oil-lamp on the table and huddled over the log fire with a book to help me forget the leopard. Five minutes later I had turned two pages without understanding a word of the text. I sat and listened to the ringing stillness of the veld outside till my ears ached with the great intense silence. Then an unreasonable fear gripped me. I got that creepy feeling that someone—or, worse still, something—was behind me. I dare not look round, yet longed to do so. It was like those last two lines of a nursery poem by Irene Heath:

You never can tell, as pussy cat said,
What might be behind on the wall

I listened for a sound, any sound, from out that singing silence, much as I dreaded hearing one. Then the sound came, unexpectedly, though so intensely expected, and I froze stiff in my chair. A prolonged growl had rumbled out of the tingling nothingness. All my blood streamed down into my shoes and solidified there, while my heart thumped in my throat. A second's pause, during which I sat taut, alert, strung to cracking-point—and then another long rumble.

Suddenly I relaxed. Oh, the relief of it! I laughed foolishly, aloud. Those growls issued from the bulldog, happily snoring in a bedroom beyond. I went

in with a lantern, and carefully turned his head over without waking him. This always had the effect of silencing the dear creature's snores. But much as I loved him, I wished it had been he, rather than the other dogs, who had elected to ride off to the distant dorp with James and Gladstone. Buller was valueless except for his beauty and his pedigree.

On my way back to the fireside I looked in its usual place for the rifle, but saw it was gone! James must have taken it with him. So I was weaponless, too, except for the Webley always kept in the sideboard drawer. Admittedly feeling a bit sheepish at my fears, I laid this little blunderbuss handy, and once more settled down to read.

But again came that acute sense of danger—real or imaginary. I felt so very alone, with one child and a useless watchdog, seven miles from a white human and thirty miles from civilization, and the leopard might even now be very near. Even the natives in their huts were three hundred yards away, probably rolled in sacks and blankets, heads included, fast asleep.

The insidious, deadly stillness sawed across my nerves. An hour later I was pacing around the living-room, trying to think of anything but my isolation, the stillness, and the tiger. Then, overcome by a sense of claustrophobia, I rashly decided I must go out and find that brute, once and for all.

Revolver in hand, for ten minutes I crept around the house, circling bushes, peering into black hollows, imagining each looming shadow to be the tiger. Then, feeling foolish again, and perhaps refreshed by the cold night air, I returned indoors. Yet, weary and sleepy as I was, I dared not go to bed, though to be sure a tiger would hardly discriminate between a woman in a nightgown and one in a frock!

The hours of silence dragged by, each minute like an age. At one o'clock a stiff wind got up, and wheezed with chill melancholy round the corners of the house. Once or twice a jackal let out his dismal, long-drawn howl. Time crawled on—one, two, two-thirty—and then—O blessed sound!—Lizzie's mutter and roar broke up that soul-destroying, eerie silence of the night veld. The baas must have tired early of the dance and made for home.

Guiltily slipping the Webley back into its drawer, I grabbed a lantern and dashed out to meet James like a Mrs. Newlywed on her honeymoon after her dear Horace has been out alone for half an hour, while James, his morning's ire quite forgotten, greeted me quite enthusiastically too. Although he returned with a snip of blue ribbon in his lapel (as a token that he had paid for his dance ticket), I could see he had enjoyed the revel. It is truly marvellous what a batch of beers and pretty girls will do for a man.

We crawled into bed, hoping for three hours' sleep before beginning work again. But it was not to be.

Very soon, loud and terrified baaing from the kraals awoke us. We shot out of bed. The tiger!

"Where's the rifle?" snapped James, scrambling into clothes.

"In the lorry—quick!" I replied, and gave him a push through the door. He looked puzzled, then dived off into the darkness, shouting to Gladstone and the rest to wake up and come and help. Generally nothing short of the skies falling will waken a native once he is asleep.

Rifle-shots, raucous shouts! "Ya, baas!"—"No, baas!"—"Where, baas?"—More shots. More confused shouting. Much bleating. Shrill baaing of scared lambkins. Holding a wakened small boy in blankets, I flattened my face against a window, peering into the night, straining to see, and seeing nothing. Then came comparative quiet with a cessation of shouting and firing, and a dwindling chorus of bleats.

When James returned he said the "swine" had escaped—too dark to see

anything. But there seemed to be ten sheep dead. The leopard, unlike the lion, which kills only for food, kills for the sheer joy of slaughter. He will often do in twenty or more sheep before he settles down, if undisturbed, to feed on but one carcase.

Next morning at breakfast I bewailed our loss.

"By the way," said James, "I'm sorry I left you without the rifle all night."

"Oh, I had the revolver," I said. It is so easy to be nonchalant and brave with the sunlight slanting across the breakfast table. Evidently a suspicion crossed James's mind. He rose and strode to the sideboard, and, lifting the revolver from its drawer, broke it open.

"H—m! You would have been safer, you know, if you had the thing loaded!" he declared, and turned the empty chambers towards me to see. I fear the tiger would not have been easily verneuked by an empty weapon aimed at him, and I thanked Heaven again that the creature had timed his visit after James's return home.

We have had other unwelcome, uninvited guests during our years at Barenklau. Early one morning a scuffling sound on the kitchen table, on investigation, proved to be an enormous brown owl, an adventurous bird who, in his nocturnal explorations, had found his way through an open window into an inhabited house. He looked solemn, but bewildered, and I think was as relieved to be shown the way out as I was glad to see him go.

Regular nightly visitors were the bats, which flew in through the open french doors of our bedrooms and circled round. We used to stand on the beds and take overarm swipes at them with tennis racquets. Sometimes the cats joined in the fun, jumping high in the air with furry arms outflung.

Also we had snakes. Such reptiles abound all the year round in the backveld, though more are to be seen during the hot steamy season of the rains than at other times. During hot weather soon after our coming to Barenklau, James and I sat one night reading after supper with the front door open. It was a stifling night. Presently, with a swishing slither, a four-foot giel-slang, as thick as your wrist, dashed like a streak into the room and under the sideboard, chivvied fearlessly in by our white Persian cat (the same who as a kitten had learnt to crawl with the Klein Baas). She was playfully patting the snake's tail in the daintiest manner as it fled before her. And we had thought that we were safe from snakes in the house, as they are known to be afraid of cats, of which we now had three!

With a really feminine shriek—such as I normally abhor in anyone else—I mounted the dining-table, thence took a flying long-jump through the door, leaving James to deal with the snake. Ten minutes later I found him standing over a dead, though still writhing, snake, with a very broken broom in his hand.

Another evening, as I sat on the front steps, James, carrying some loops of tethering reims, approached through the quickly falling darkness. As he passed a bush about twenty yards from me he heard a hiss—sss. The bush was directly between my line of vision and James's figure, so that when he stooped to investigate the sound I thought the sinuous, red-brown coils above the bush were part of the reims dangling from his fingers. Then, within a foot of his lowered face, I saw a cobra's hood spread out, while the snake reared and drew back preparatory to striking forward with all its weight. I leapt up.

"Step aside!" I snapped, with such insistence that James obeyed in the nick of time. Two minutes later that cobra had been despatched to its snaky paradise at the persuasion of the reims James carried. And how my knees wobbled as I went indoors to light the lamps and cook supper.

One morning, while turning over the chickens' water-tins in order to refill them, my hand nearly touched a little blue-and-black-striped snake with two

little horns on its head. It had been sleeping in a depression under a tin. Although the wee fellow had frightened me, I was loathe to drop a stone on him, for he really was pretty, and tiny. But though he looked so innocuous and small, I found afterwards I had done right in killing him, as the bite of his kind is deadly. Most newcomers instinctively grab a stick as the proper weapon with which to kill a snake, and are very surprised when the point of the stick strikes the ground and the snake escapes. A very pliant cane may do, but undoubtedly the best weapon is a stout thonged whip. You cannot miss with that if you attack boldly.

It was after these experiences that we sent to Port Elizabeth for a dose of anti-venom serum and a hypodermic syringe. And we have always renewed our order every second year, as the serum is not guaranteed for more than two years.

It must not be thought that snaky adventures occur every day, and that people live in constant fear of them. The chances of being bitten by a poisonous snake (and many South African snakes are quite harmless) are far less than being run over by a bus in London, or being a road casualty anywhere in Britain!

The secretary birds, like storks in appearance, and very sedate-looking except for a jaunty quill-like crest of feathers on the head, kill many snakes, and are always a welcome sight.

Once our garden was invaded by a lot of tiny skalpats, or miniature tortoises. They did little harm, so we left them and regarded them as pets, welcome to a few lettuce leaves. I oiled and polished the shell of one of them, and he looked very handsome. These little skalpats abound in this district, and it is known that Bushman women make the shells into powder-boxes! For these pigmies of the Kalahari, uncouth and utterly wild as is their life, really do powder their faces with powder made from dried crushed roots. Living in a great thirstland, they never wash, for every drop of liquid is vitally precious, so the powder goes on over the dirt of decades.

Sometimes, to vary our diet of mutton, we had casserole sand grouse, or Namaqua partridge. These small birds came in flocks of hundreds to drink at the pans at sunrise, and sometimes congregated at our reservoir behind the house.

The pauw, or bustard, was another bird which made good eating, although very occasionally, for he is scarce and protected. Failing a goose or turkey, the pauw makes an excellent Christmas bird. The korhaan, or lesser bustard, was very much more plentiful, and could often be seen and heard rising from the ground with hoarse, clacking cries, trailing his yellow legs after him.

We also had meerkats in the garden, squirrel-like little things, who came to burrow for the juicy grubs they found in the manured soil. Wire netting did not keep them out, as they just dug under it, and, once in, did much damage, scratching among the seedlings.

Nightly we heard the howls of Vossie, the red jackal, in search of his dinner. He is a comely animal with a ginger pelt paling to rich cream on the belly, and a black saddle frosted with white hairs. Vossies' hides, worked into a kaross along with the skins from the brown dassies, or rock rabbits, give a lovely fur rug.

Sometimes we also saw a grey jackal out at sunset. But although not as beautiful as his red cousin, he is harmless to sheep, being a vegetarian, and therefore much less unwelcome on a sheep farm.

Barenklau also suffered from the ardvaark, or ant-bear, who was a nuisance with his burrowing habits. Theoretically he keeps down the ants, but somehow we still had plenty of ants too of different sizes and shades, particularly the large red ants, and black ones. These ants seemed to enjoy nothing so much as marching in a straight line across country, like a tank. A long column of them

would come up our stoep wall, across the stoep, up and down through the living-room window, through the kitchen hatch, across the kitchen, and out through the back. Any food found en route would be smothered with ants, and devoured. The legs of the food-cooler on the back stoep had always to be kept standing in bowls of water. Happily ants cannot swim. But often our cats and dogs would lap these bowls dry, or a film of dust would form overnight on the water, across which "thin ice" the ants could swarm at ease. Then up the legs of the cooler, and in through the perforated zinc the little horrors would scramble, and fall upon our food.

Although ants of various kinds are found in most countries, the ardvaark is peculiar to Africa. I would have liked a tame ardvaark alongside our food cooler, but the creature is not beautiful or tamable. He is very shy indeed.

Many of the trees on Barenklau were heavily laden with the nests of the weaver birds, sometimes called community birds. These tiny birds love to nest gregariously in large, unwieldy nests, woven from grasses into a huge block, and sectioned off inside like family flats or little rows of apartments! These communal nests are added to yearly, till finally the weight causes a collapse, and a new block has to be started. The outer entrances to the nests are all underneath, so that the tenants must fly upwards into their homes. This is to prevent the entrance of snakes after the succulent eggs.

Although the Kalahari Desert is a great breeding-ground for locusts, not once did this pest ever devastate Barenklau. All the tea grown in China does not stay there! The desert is an ideal breeding-place. During the dry years, millions of eggs accumulate in the dry sand. Then when the rain at last falls they hatch out into little grasshopper-like creatures, which the Boers call voetgangers (footsloggers). Fortunately many voetgangers are destroyed before they evolve into the locust, with its file-like legs and voracious appetite which destroys whole districts of green crops. The Bushmen of the Kalahari, the locust birds, and ostriches eat myriads. The locust bird is a white bird of the stork tribe, and nearly as large.

It is at the voetganger stage that locusts can best be located and destroyed. Any farmer hearing of them in his vicinity immediately drives off to the spot armed with pump, sprays, and cans of arsenical poison. Nowadays, poison injurious to locusts only is mixed with bran, and spread for them to eat.

Once locusts have grown their wings and taken flight, nothing can stop them in their work of destruction. Fires are lit, tins are banged, cloths are waved, but neither smoke, din, or any alarms stay them by one second. The sky is clouded like the grey darkness before a fall of snow, then, shining against the sun, the locusts settle like flakes all over the green lands. In no time there is just brown earth dotted with shaven stalks of mealie and sunflower—and where smaller plants grew, just brown earth. All that you have toiled to achieve disappears in an hour, and the sense of impotence with which you watch it happening is crushing.

There is just one plant grown a great deal in southern Africa which the locust does not favour. This is the leguminous, mauve-flowered lucerne (alfalfa). He eats it only if there is nothing else.

Strange though it sounds, there is quite a proportion of born South Africans in this country who have never seen most of the creatures we met so soon after going to Barenklau. We once had a visitor for a month, a young girl friend from Johannesburg, who was amazed at many of the animals we were able to show her. And because she had lived in a big city all her life, where a snake is scarcely ever seen, she was particularly frightened of the idea of meeting one. She was more positively apprehensive and averse to them than anyone I have ever met. While living out on the veld with us, she would, every night before going to bed,

arm herself with a torch and diligently search for a reptile under every piece of furniture in the house! She was like the old maid who vainly searched under her bed for a man. We often laughed at our visitor's unprotected posterior, as she dived under one cretonne chair frill after another. And she never found anything all the month she was with us. I really think she returned to the safety of Jo'burg quite disappointed that we had not been able to provide one single snake to frighten her!

CHAPTER XIV

OUR RAW WOOL HAD BEEN SELLING STEADILY AT 1/6 PER POUND. YOU CAN FARM profitably at 1/- per pound, so the farm had yielded a measure of prosperity. Accordingly we decided one year on a holiday. We wanted to go northward this time.

First we went to Walvis Bay just to see it, and worked back from that rail terminus on the coast to Swakopmund and Windhoek. It is a twenty-four-hour journey to Walvis Bay, but excitement began almost immediately. A few hours out of Mariental a herd of cattle elected to cross the line, and we had to pull up. Shrieks and hoots from the engine did not stop the trek, so our engine-driver and greaser, and some of the passengers, climbed down and chased the beasts away. This sort of thing occurs frequently out here, where railway fencing is conspicuous by its absence. Trains stop for other reasons too. Once the engine-driver's hat had to be retrieved when it had blown off. And when we met a goods train it was discovered that its driver and ours were sworn enemies. Each pulled up and got down to intensify the sooty blackness of the other's eyes, while the delighted passengers watched the fight from the carriage windows and laid bets on the scrap!

There is a little branch railway from Windhoek up to Omaruru which is run on wood. If the supply of fuel runs out the train stops, and the driver and passengers climb out and collect more wood on the veld. Time is of no object to the railways which function on the rim of beyond!

The south-easterly run from Windhoek proved uncomfortable. From day-break till mid-day a sandstorm followed us, so that after eight hours of it we were glad indeed to reach Swakopmund on the coast. Here the desert storm swept straight into the sea, while we ran clear of it by virtue of the line again turning due south for a two hours' run down the coast to Walvis Bay. Between Swakopmund and Walvis the line ran right by the edge of the sea, and we enjoyed the refreshing sight of huge, green Atlantic rollers frothing up pure yellow sands almost to our wheels. It was just such a sight as A. A. Milne described when he wrote:

The green curls over, and the white falls under,
Boom, boom, boom,
On the sunbright sand.

Walvis Bay proved to be a small collection of squat, tin-roofed, whitewashed bungalows and iron shacks, cuddled in a spread of amber sand, curled like a dog which has found a warm place in which to sleep. Its one-storeyed squatness is relieved only by a few bigger buildings such as the Imperial Cold Storage place, and one or two other business houses.

Not even a hardy pepper tree or blue gum grew in Walvis Bay. Not a shrub or blade of green anywhere broke the flat brown landscape of this small dorp. Only away in the background where the swelling dunes of the Namib Desert rose up was there a smear of pale colour where some spiky, coarse grass pierced the humping sand.

Arrived at the hotel, we passengers queued up for the bathroom, and afterwards felt different beings.

During the afternoon, in all the dryness of Walvis, my small boy actually found a puddle into which to fall, to the devastation of his freshly bathed and suited state. The outlet pipe of the hotel laundry had drawn him like a magnet, with the result that siesta-time was spent by him and myself in the bathroom again. I mention the incident because I found baths charged on our bill at 2/6 a time. Anyway, it was lucky I had collected a good supply of small boy's clothes for this holiday.

Thanks to the presence off the coast of a cold ocean stream, the Benguela current, Swakop and Walvis are compensated for their dreary situation by a climate that is pleasant, if warm, all the year round. And this in spite of the fact that both dorps are situated in a rainless belt of desert getting but a sprinkling of rain: a mere quarter-inch a year! And sometimes this coast is muffled in dense fog owing to the proximity of the icy sea-current to the furnace-like climate of the Namib Desert.

Despite its ugliness, Walvis was intriguing. For one thing, it was amusing to discover that in spite of that quarter-inch of rainfall it has more than once been cut off from the civilized world by floods! This is because the Swakop River, which empties into the Atlantic just below Swakopmund, sometimes comes down in spate after heavy rains at its source in the mountains far inland, and washes away the railway bridge. In 1930 the bridge went twice within the one rainy season of the hinterland, although Swakop and Walvis had not been favoured with a drop.

There is scarcely a tree within twelve miles of this coast; only an occasional kokerboom, with its big clusters of bright yellow flowers brightening the landscape in winter. Such few trees and bushes as exist have their trunks and main stems bent grotesquely L-shaped just above ground by the fierce winds which sometimes lash the coast. Koker is the Dutch word for quiver, and the kokerboom is so called because the Hottentots use the pithy branches to make the quivers for their arrows.

A flash of miraculous colour in the drabness of Walvis Bay was provided by the flamingoes. We had seen these birds before elsewhere than in Africa, but each time you see them you cannot fail to be thrilled by the exquisite effect when a flock of them rises into the air to fly across the mirror of wet sand and water. Spreading their great white wings, which are a rosy pink on the underside, they stain the shining surface below them a glorious rose red in reflection.

Walvis Bay lies on a wildly romantic coast. If you went into the hotel bar, which is the most important part of any hotel in Southern Africa, and listened to the prospectors, traders, and beachcombers getting talkative over their tankards of German beer, you would catch the mention of such thrilling names as Sandwich Bay, Conception, Spencer Bay, Hottentot Bay, and the Namib Desert, which backs the whole of this coast. And you would hear tales of the wonders the ever-shifting dunes of this coast, some 600 feet in height, reveal in their onward, growling march. Fifty years ago the thriving little township of Sandwich Bay was buried in sand, and its harbour silted up. Fifty years hence it may be revealed again. The high winds blow, piling the sand this way and that, and foot by foot the dunes crawl on, hiding and restoring alternately through the years the hulls of Portuguese traders and slave ships, tea clippers, East Indiamen,

and old sailing-ships of all kinds wrecked centuries ago on this inhospitable, empty shore, 900 miles long, by the treacherous Benguela current. It is even said that the East Indiaman loaded with the rich spoil of the Delhi palaces after Clive had sacked that city in the eighteenth century was wrecked on this strip of coast, and that some day, perhaps, the moving sand-dunes will show again the treasure chests and wonderful jewels of the Great Moghul. Meanwhile, the story goes, a vast fortune lies buried in the sands somewhere not far south of modern Walvis Bay, where steamships now call and the mechanized life of the twentieth century carries on its daily business. We listened delightedly to the yarns that came our way, until we almost longed to sally forth into the desert in search of the skulls of shipwrecked mariners, bleached bones, ships' figureheads, and treasure chests. But many have tried it and never returned.

And there are diamonds to be found in most magical quantities down this coast of South-West Africa, though admittedly a good deal further south than Walvis Bay. But, of course, you cannot go out and help yourself, for although the gems, when located, are heaped there in funnels and pockets of rock and sand, Government controls the diamonds, and stealing, and illicit buying from those who have been stealing, are crimes most severely punished.

We met a man here who had made his wealth out of diamonds, but he had worked on the principle that it is he who handles the goods, and not he who produces them, who gets rich. When a certain diamond field in South-West was discovered many years ago he went to the spot, but never pegged a claim. Instead, he set up a little trading store. He did well, and so set up a soda factory. He found it paid him handsomely to buy the water for his factory at a penny a gallon. It was water transported dozens of miles by wagons, long before the railway came that way. He made enough soda-water to supply the local population of the diamond field, and also started to send cases of soda down to Cape Town. When the police heard of this enterprise they asked themselves, "Why send soda-water to a well-watered spot like Cape Town from a desert diamond field?" By the time the law had laboriously checked up and collected its proofs the soda manufacturer had discreetly closed and dismantled his factory. He had made a pile of money. You see, a diamond in clear water is invisible, and nearly every bottle sent to the Cape had contained an illicit diamond to be sold by a confederate in Cape Town! In those days natives who managed to steal rough diamonds from the white men who were their employers would sell any stone passing through a wedding ring for 2/6. A bigger stone cost a bit more. So fortunes were made, not by mining diamonds, but by "handling" them.

.

Our everlasting desire to see things betrayed us into accepting an invitation from the hotel proprietor's daughter to accompany herself and her father to see the whaling station among the dunes five miles down the coast. One other—a man—also decided to come. The idea was to drive there on the lorry conveying all the passengers' kit for the German Woermann liner *Watussi*, sailing next dawn for Europe, and to deliver the luggage on our return journey. Balanced on a pile of luggage, then, we gaily set off about 3.30 p.m., along a deep sandy track. All went well to within two hundred yards of the whaling station. There, where the smell of dead whale was at its deadliest, we stuck in the sand. The usual expedients of pushing, swearing, and the skilled use of tools availed us nothing. But the hotel proprietor rose to the occasion. While we started to look over the station, he sought out the captain of the place, and besought him for the loan of his private launch to take us home by sea. This was arranged, and so we did our sight-seeing with free minds. The kit problem did not worry us, I am afraid.

We were lucky in that we happened on the station on a day when a whale was on the slips and was being cut up. The sight was undeniably repulsive, though interesting. The gigantic carcase lay in a big, wood-paved yard, bounded on three sides by the factory buildings, and on the fourth, of course, by the sea. As we circled round the mammoth, we had to tread gingerly as a cat, for the vast floor was slippery with blood and salt water. Men were busily cutting up the monster, using long-handled knives like inverted sickles to slice the blubber into slabs about eighteen inches square and some six inches thick. These slabs were then fed by others into a steam-driven slicer, which emptied the minced-up blubber into a train of buckets ascending into the boiler-rooms of the building on the right of the yard. Here the blubber was rendered into oil. The whalebone all went to the left-hand building, where fishmeal and other such products resulted from its treatment there.

When the time came to go home in the whaling captain's launch we once more crossed the blood-soaked slips and walked along a wooden jetty. The tide was low, and below the jetty a small launch bobbed like a storm-tossed cork about ten feet beneath us. There seemed to be no ladder. The sailor in the launch laughed, and called up, "You just jump!" as if it were as easy as eating cake. The first jumper landed on his knees and lovingly clasped the astonished sailor round the neck. James took a running leap and nearly sank the craft. I threw the Klein Baas ahead of me, and then myself hit the deck with a smack as the launch rose on a crest. My spine felt jammed through the crown of my hat. Also the sailor rather muffled his catch, so that for a moment we all hugged spasmodically together to save ourselves overbalancing into the sea.

The harbour was choppy, but the trip across was jolly. As we passed under the Post Damper *Watussi's* seaward side we felt rather important when passengers leant over the taffrail in apparent admiration. Or perhaps they were merely gazing at the emptying bilges, as ships' passengers often do. They little guessed what we had done with their kit!

To disembark was almost as hectic as embarking had been. It meant jumping out and upwards on to a flight of sea-washed stone steps, so slippery with green weed that we landlubbers crawled up them on hands and knees, to the amusement of the sailor.

We heard later that the *Watussi's* passengers had been very agitated about the non-arrival of their hand luggage. Anyone could imagine the scene on board as a mob of anxious people milled round a distracted chief steward, who wished them all further. Yes, he'd let them know the moment the stuff came aboard. No, he could do nothing about it. Yes, yes, he felt sure it would be all right. "No, madam, I don't expect you will have to travel to England in the frock you stand up in." Poor man! Poor passengers! But the stuff was rescued by moonlight and taken aboard after midnight.

Besides the harbour, another reason for the existence of Walvis is the cold-storage plant I have mentioned. James looked over it, but I did not care to see anything of this huge slaughter-house, which handles the country's beef and mutton, and in which the heads of pigs are automatically chopped off as they pass along a conveyor!

Walvis Bay, and a surrounding 450 square miles of desert, became British during the German rule of South-West Africa. In our own charming way our Navy just went in and ran up the Union Jack in what they realized was a decent natural harbour. It would make a useful port, Britain thought, and she had heard rumours of mineral wealth in the interior of the country. So she pegged a stake, and got away with it. Germany was not too pleased, but we sat tight. That was in 1878.

When James and I saw this bay it looked like any other bit of sea. But it

seems there is a volcano under its surface, for not only once, but several times during the last forty years, has there been a sub-ocean eruption which threw up an island in the middle of the bay, an island exhaling steam and sulphurous fumes, and covered with dead fish, which stays above surface a few days and then subsides beneath the waters.

It may be in this way that some of the chain of islands down this coast came into being, though these latter are permanent. The largest is some three miles in length, and some are no more than large rocks. Forming a chain from Walvis to the Cape, they are bleak and desolate, but yield a rich harvest from guano. Possession Island, Dassen, Jutten, Ichaboe, and others have a penguin and gannet population of myriads, while seals are also plentiful on and around them.

From 1914 to 1918 we fought for this coast and South-West, that paradoxical country, so rich and so bare, yet we could have had it all for nothing at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The few pioneers, prospectors, and missionaries then in South-West, which was still a black man's country, asked Britain for her protection. But Britain was adamantly disinterested. They then appealed to Germany. Bismarck's policy was then one of "no colonization", and he in his turn suggested Britain for the job! But Britain again said "No." Finally, Germany changed her mind, and herself occupied South-West. The whole thing was analogous to the history of the Cape and Natal.

Swakopmund is the summer resort of South-West Africa, and purely a residential place. Our amusements during our week there consisted of climbing the lighthouse, bathing in the surf, and visiting the Hansa brewery, which dispenses a free glass of beer to each visitor. Their beer was wonderful! We froze in their refrigerator chambers, and were glad to get out again into a temperature of something over ninety in the shade.

You cross the roads of Swakop at given points, on duckboards reminiscent, James said, of Flanders in the Great War, with the difference that there one needed to avoid mud, while here it was deep sand. For the same reason the chief wheeled vehicles of Swakop are quaint, horse-drawn trolleys running on light lines. It is said a taxi or two exists for hire by an occasional plutocrat, but the common herd clanks over the sand behind horses and a Herrero jehu.

We also looked up two schoolboys, the sons of neighbouring farmers near Mariental, and took them to a German café for the traditional blow-out of sundaes, cake, and tea.

The Government school building at Swakop is very fine indeed, and the hostels for both boys and girls very well run. There is no doubt that the physical welfare of children in South African schools is well considered, and the education given is excellent. In the past the bogey of matriculation hung like an impending sword over every child, but South Africa marches with the times, in education as in all matters of importance.

Strangely, the most pleasant spot in Swakop was the cemetery. Here, engineering skill had overcome the acute water difficulty, and the place was a mass of flowers. It was wonderful, considering that every drop of fresh water on this coast is got by the condensation of sea water. This God's acre in the sand was really worthy, and a last resting-place of peace and beauty such as man's poor body surely deserves after it has carried him through the hardships and sorrows of this world. I use the word "strangely" because the cemetery in rural South Africa is too often the last place in which anyone would wish for his permanent sleep. The Mariental graveyard, and other dorp burying-grounds, always made me pray hard for a long life whenever I passed them. James said "Don't be silly" when once I made him promise to plant me under one of our own orange trees on Barenklau if I passed out in Africa, rather than under a pebbly mound on the outskirts of Mariental.

After leaving Swakopmund we spent four days in Windhoek, our capital, and enjoyed it. The town is clean and inviting, with wide streets, first-class hotels, a palm-shaded beer-garden where a good band plays for those who want to dance in an open-air pavilion, and a general air of continental brightness about it. For comfort's sake a car is advisable, for the town is built in the mountains, and roads climb up and down big hills. The suburb of Klein Windhoek is quite enchanting, with vineyards, citrus orchards, and market gardens spread on the fertile hillsides, where mica outcrops glisten and wink in the sunlight. Windhoek gets twelve to fifteen inches of rain a year, so that flowers and such fruits as strawberries and other delights are grown there. A picturesque touch is added to the landscape by several schlosses perched on rocky crags around the town, in which, prior to 1914, exiled German barons lived in feudal style, I believe. The air of the place seems always crystal clear, the colourings all around very vivid, and the overhead sky eternally a heavenly blue. I felt I would rather be anything but colour-blind in Windhoek.

To all living in South-West, Windhoek is the Mecca of the shopper and the sick. Its shops are full of most enticing and chic clothes from Paris and Berlin. I often wondered who bought them and wore them, for the German fraus certainly did not! The hospital is first class, we heard, and there are excellent doctors and dentists in the town. If our teeth ached on Barenklau, we must either extract them at home with pliers, or with string and a doorknob, or travel two hundred miles north to Windhoek, for Mariental boasted no dentist. Once our friend the doctor in Mariental said to James, "Don't go all the way to Windhoek; I'll take them out free for you. I want some practice!"

CHAPTER XV

SINCE THE NEW HOMESTEAD IN THE WILDS OF SOUTH-WEST AFRICA WAS BUILT, the wire-netted acre of wilderness around it must be made into a garden: an emerald patch set in the gold of the surrounding sand-veld.

The annual rains were not due for many moons yet, so we must use irrigation. Furrows from the dam must be planned and made, and thorn bushes and the weedy opeslak cleared. But we would leave some of the grey, velvet-leaved gávé bushes, which in the rains would put forth their frilled white flowers.

Trees to give shade and protection to the small plants were the first consideration. Blue gums grow quickly, but as nothing else will thrive around their greedy roots they were destined to become tall pillars of rustling green in the far corners of the garden. There, too, for the same reason, pale pepper trees could put forth their tiny bee-attracting flowers and their pink berries. Feathery tamarisks should grace the front of the homestead, over the stoep of which I hoped bougainvillea would shower its royal purple. (It didn't!—and we later planted the humble railway creeper.) In the front poinsettias, pink and white oleanders, and scarlet hibiscus should flower too.

Willows would droop over the irrigation furrows to shade the spreading mint. And, most important of all, two long rows of citrus trees (navel oranges, lemons and naartjes) were to give us the scent of their starry blossoms, and the lusciousness of golden fruit, when the baby trees grew bigger. A grape-vine trellis

would provide cool shade for siesta, and cup-shaped fig trees would yield a favourite fruit.

Into the sunk beds we put the seeds of lettuce and cucumber, spanspek melons and watermelons, squash, the ubiquitous pumpkin, tomatoes, monkey-nuts, and carrots.

The kitchen patch would be divided from our flower garden by a lattice fence. Calabash and the "Heavenly Blue" and purple morning glory should share the honour of making this barrier. And a fast-growing kudzu vine would arch over the dividing gate.

And between this fence and the house there would be hosts of dainty cosmos, rioting nasturtiums, the brilliance of portulaca, poppies, antirrhinums, and other hardy favourites.

When the cuttings and seeds were in Gladstone was summoned to lead water on the prospective paradise. An hour later Gladstone was discovered sound asleep beneath the grapes, while the precious water flowed to waste in all directions where no seeds were. Gladstone as a gardener was no better than Jacob!

There were other setbacks. Marauding meerkats burrowed in, to search for grubs in the manure. Stembok came in to graze off the sprouting greenery; their dainty spoor betrayed them. The fowls flew the fences to appreciate the lettuces, the farm goats entered in to "make hay", when Gladstone characteristically forgot to close the gates, while not once, but several times, Fian Hitler the cow had to be turned out of the patch of green mealies.

But things recover and grow quickly out here. With much heat, applied moisture, and energy, the garden came on rapidly.

Then Nature rose up and mocked our efforts. One day, beyond the shimmering heat-waves which jazzed across the veld, a long copper cloud stretched along the horizon. The brown haze rushed towards us, like a khaki army led by its generals; the roaring sand-devils, pillars of desert dust, which swayed and snaked up into the sky.

One sandy whirlpool, as it howled past the homestead, sucked up a Minorca pullet, and sent her spinning round like a farmyard Pavlova, then dropped her dazed and limp.

A hot, sand-laden wind shrieked up with the sand-devils. Dust sprayed through the house in spite of closed windows. We fought our way down to the dam to turn off the windmill, in case the gale should blow its head away. A blinding ochre fog enveloped our world. The homestead rocked and moaned. The sun went out, and we groped in an unreal, amber dullness. There was "sand in the eyes and the ears and the nose". All afternoon and all night the black gale screamed by.

Next morning our budding garden was gone. Sunk beds, water channels, collapsed archways, and flowering barriers were levelled and buried under the drifts of Kalahari sand. Only here and there a poor parched twig stuck bravely up.

We gazed dumbly at the desolation that had been our hard-won garden, and tried to put self-pity away from us. We must begin again. After all, things grow quickly out here—with applied energy.

When we set about remaking the garden, two Boer brothers, who farmed in partnership seven miles to westward of us, helped us tremendously, for they knew everything about gardening. They were the same two brothers who had camped on Barenklau pending the purchase of their own place. Andries, the younger, was the less shy. Often he would visit us and give good advice.

"You should do this, do that, transplant these," he would say. "Look, I'll show you for five minutes." And three hours later he would still be working! Then:

"*Vraatig!* It's late. I must go now."

"Stay to supper," I would say. And after supper, in the last of the daylight, we would do some more transplanting, till night suddenly threw her cloak over us.

It was Andries who made me properly appreciate the back-to-front seasons (summer in December), and taught me how to meet them. He told me when to put things in, and often brought seedlings and plants from his own flourishing garden. Andries had green fingers; everything grew for him.

"I want tamarisk trees in front of the house, but James has thrown cold water on them," I told Andries. He chuckled.

"That's the best thing he could throw on them!" he said. Later, when the tamarisks, which James had prophesied would fail, grew and flowered purple, and later turned to tawny, lovely shades, James would point them out to visitors and say proudly: "Look at our tamarisks!" And the trees would wave their feathery leaves in the breeze and whisper, "Andries! Andries!"

The "pot" plants around the stoep grew well in their tins. Andries cut open the petrol drums for me, and with a pair of old curling-tongs made decorative edges for them. James became quite an expert at this art later. I watered the tinned plants every evening, and gave the lizards a drink. These bright-eyed green creatures, invisible, till they moved, among the foliage and green-painted tins, came out to flick their long tongues and suck in the drops of water on the leaves of the plants, along with flies, mosquitoes and other delicacies.

The uses of the petrol tin or "blik" are innumerable. Southern Africa is held together by bliks and wire. Besides providing plant-pots, sheds are roofed with flattened bliks; natives build whole huts with them. I always remember Keetmanshoop location as a blik town glittering in the sunshine. For travelling, tin trunks are made of bliks. Everyone carries water in four-gallon bliks (with a wire handle). One-gallon bliks make excellent tins for bread-baking. The blik is invaluable in the storeroom. With a long side cut out, and the edges neatened over wire, four-gallon bliks make splendid drawers for a filing cabinet, chest of drawers, or dressing-table. Gardeners' seed "boxes" are always bliks cut in two in this country. The interiors of outdoor ovens are lined with bliks. And many a house has incredibly neat guttering made from bent blik!

The wooden cases in which the bliks arrive in pairs are put to many uses too. James evolved some remarkable stoep chairs from these cases. They were a bit hard, and one visitor candidly said they guaranteed the swift departure of any guest! Yet, painted green and cushioned brightly in stripes, we thought them lovely.

Sometimes when we drove over to see the bachelor brothers, and take them a home-made cake, we would learn a lot by working in their garden. Andries would rope us in as easily as he offered help. This mutual aid is the spirit of the South African veld. In the old, tough days it often meant the difference between ruin or success. Today it is a grand tradition.

One afternoon while we helped Andries plant out cabbages the Karroo and Britstown were mentioned. Andries said he knew Britstown. We discovered mutual friends. He knew the Cilliers.

"You remember Sannie Cilliers?" I asked.

"Yes, she was a pretty kid," Andries replied.

"Kid! You should see her now; she's lovely," I told him.

"As the only girl with five brothers, she must be spoilt."

"Not a bit!" I said emphatically.

Andries straightened his back to tell of a plan for a holiday. He intended going down to the Karroo shortly. He would look up the Cilliers.

He did. And after that, though he never mentioned the Cilliers except occasionally and casually, he slipped down to the Karroo so often (a mere 500

miles) that his brother Frans got annoyed at having to run their farm single-handed.

Of course Andries married Sannie, and the holidays to the Karroo ended. The vastness of South Africa is sometimes a small space, though it surely is irritating when on a trip to Europe, to be asked, "You come from South Africa?" —Do you know the Smiths out there?"

It was delightful having Sannie as a next-door neighbour.

Meanwhile, as Andries and Frans went South for Andries' wedding, James and I, at the bridegroom's urgent request, "did something" as regards the house to which the bride was to come home. I had often itched to get at that bachelor abode. I knew Sannie would like to put all the final touches herself, but without anticipating her tastes at all there was much we could do.

Accompanied by my housegirl, we wired into the job for several days in a smother of lather and Lysol, paints, whitewash, and furniture and floor polishes. We scrubbed everything scrubbable, washed every bit of glass, crockery, mirrors, windows, and hardware, and laundered everything possible. The bachelor house was a spring-cleaner's paradise when we started; it glowed like hell when we had finished. On the last morning we put flowers in vases and bowls, made beds, and stocked up the larder with fresh-baked loaves, pastries, pies, cake, butter, etc., etc. And then we tore home in Lizzie to get ready for Sannie, Andries, and Frans, at Barenklau. They were to arrive at mid-day on that bi-weekly mail from Cape Town. They would have dinner in Mariental, and be with us for tea and supper on their way home. Frans intended to continue farming with them. The Boer family, happily, does not split up easily.

I was glad Sannie had married on to the veld where she belonged. She could not have done a happier thing. How joyous she would be now, using that lovely "Hope Chest" she had long since prepared for herself and her future home! Like every Boer girl, Sannie, sure enough, turned out to be a born hausfrau. What had been merely a nice house before was soon transformed by her into a home of comfort and sweetness. Andries simply shone with happiness, and soon she even brought the quiet Frans out of his shell in a way no one else had done.

One night at a dance in Mariental we met more new neighbours. This time they were three young men in partnership on a place some thirty miles to the south of Barenklau. One had been a bank clerk, the second a wouldn't-be-solicitor, and the third the son of a prosperous butcher in England, who did not want to follow his father's business. They had not much capital, though enough for a start, but they had the assets the veld demands. Their outlook on life was just right. Really, they were intensely earnest about their work, but hid this under a bubbling flippancy which made them impervious to all knocks of misfortune, and delightful as companions.

Oh yes! They had learnt one end of a sheep from the other, and they no longer threw out the garden seedlings and kept the weeds to grow. Their farming was getting on fine. What worried the three was their domestic arrangements and commissariat.

"Haven't you a couple of girls who scrub and cook for you?" I asked. Dick (the ex-bank-clerk) sat with me under the oleanders and the moon.

"We've a boy called Sixpence," he said, "and that's about his worth, anyway." Could I explain how to get porridge out of a kettle? Sixpence had cooked oatmeal in one recently, and ever since then their tea had been laced with slimy lumps!

I gave the three advice and recipes, suggesting that in the present cold weather "duffs" would be palatable and very simple to make. I promised that soon James and I would drive over and give more practical aid. They rejoiced

at this idea, and that same evening fixed a date for us to go to "lunch". Protesting, we said we could picnic on the way. But no, it was to be a lunch party!

To the mystification of the whole area, these three boys had named their farm "If It". Said Dick, "If it prospers—good. If it doesn't—well . . ." He pulled a face and spread his hands.

That lunch party! The soup was heavenly. It had come seven thousand miles in tins and was one of fifty-seven varieties. The leg of mutton might have been worse—it was singed—the cabbage was boiled to a rose-madder shade, and the potatoes were neither mashed nor whole. But the *pièce de résistance* was the pudding.

During the long amateur pause between the acts, Tim (the wouldn't-be solicitor) beamed and announced:

"We've made you a duff. We made it ourselves too!"

"Yes," said Dick, "I dictated from the book of words, Tim dropped the stuff into the basin, and John stirred."

"That sounds O.K. to me," said James, knowing nothing about it.

"Sixpence is dishing up," said Tim tactfully, to cover up the long-stretched pause.

Presently Sixpence entered to us, and deposited a large meat-dish on the table. On it was a grey, wet bolster wallowing in the middle of a shallow lake of greasy liquid. We all stared at it, polite but a bit hypnotized.

Then, "How do we carve it?" asked Dick.

"I don't think we cut through the cloth." Tim sounded uncertain. John sprang from his seat and tore his hair. "Good heavens, no! That's the tail of my best shirt!"

They were at it again, with their flippancies, hiding with a barrage of humour their henchman's *faux pas* in bringing in the pudding complete with cloth and string.

We cut off the string at each end and unrolled the cloth. But the pudding would not leave go. When the cloth was out flat the thing looked like an antiphlogistin plaster with knobs on.

"You didn't add glue to the mixture, Tim?" John asked.

The Klein Baas solved the problem of how to eat that duff. Picking up his spoon, he dive-bombed the centre knob of duff, and after that we each chose an objective and scooped our portion off the cloth. It necessitated standing up while we ate. And the Klein Baas was not the only one who started to giggle, while a quickfire of crazy repartee was flung around.

It was a jolly good duff!

We told the lads how we had already risen to the high accomplishment of curing our own bacon. First we had bought a pig and a barrel. Then before we grew too fond of it (the pig) Gladstone killed it for us, and singed, cleaned, and shaved it. We indulged in a joint of fresh pork, not to mention eating the liver, kidneys, trotters, and chaps, and making some brawn, and cut up the rest for pickling. The joints were kept in a barrel of brine for three weeks. Then they were taken out and washed in a solution of bicarbonate of soda in the bath. It was the only utensil big enough.

Meanwhile, James had prepared a vast square box. It was minus one side, and on the floor of it he had screwed in a cup-hook for each joint of pig.

In a corner of the garden, with his mind on ham, which he loves, James dug a square hole about four feet deep. From it led a trench which ended in another depression. The open box with the joints hanging inside was placed over the first hole, the trench was covered with sheets of corrugated iron, and a smoky fire of green wood was lit in the second hole. The theory was that the smoke would be drawn by draught along the trench and up into the box. But whenever we

went along to replenish the fire, which had to be kept going unceasingly, we fought our way through a pall of smoke and flames suggestive of an incendiary raid!

Sometimes we got up through the night to stoke that fire, and in the middle of the last night the fuel dump ran out.

"So we cut down some branches off a nuniboom in our dressing-gowns with lanterns," I told Dick.

"I hope the lanterns were sharp," he retorted, and grinned

The resulting bacon really was worth the trouble all the same. We cooked the first ham in grape-juice in time for that Christmas. With white honeypot grapes at 2d. a pound anywhere in South Africa, this is always possible. We grew them on Barenklau. You put about ten pounds of grapes through a mangle with a basin underneath, put the resulting juice into a clean four-gallon blik, add brown sugar, and put in the ham (soaked as usual overnight in cold water). The ham can be stuck with cloves, if these are liked. While it is cooking, you baste it frequently with the grape-juice. Afterwards I even experimented with the liquor, making it into a very good white cream soup.

When skinned, covered with raspings, and garnished with a frill, obligingly cut by the Klein Baas, that ham might have come out of a Piccadilly shop specializing in hams.

Yet James, who had dug the trench and the holes, murmured "Never again!" when a second pig was suggested. Dick thought he might try it.

We drove home after an early cup of tea, and as we approached Barenklau there came to meet us from several directions luminous, translucent clouds of dust. There was a faint distant baa-ing. The sheep were returning from the day's grazing, and now we must count them all. The hamals are sober gentlemen who generally trail willingly through the kraal gate, following each other "like sheep". A beginner at counting should always practise first on the hamal flocks—unless, of course, he is in bed, and the cure for insomnia does not demand accuracy! The lambs are the most difficult to manage. They do not want to go to bed, and chase each other madly round the outside of the kraals, or play *king-of-the-castle up and down the ant-heaps*. Or they skip and scutter away across the veld with white-stockinged legs twinkling and their absurd tails flapping wildly, refusing to return till they wish. Yet get them bedded you must.

CHAPTER XVI

FOR ONE BLACK PERIOD SOUTHERN AFRICA, WITH THE REST OF THE WORLD, suffered a slump. The wool market became a farce, for wool dropped from a nice steady 1/- per pound net to 5d. per pound, and then sank to the nominal sum of one penny. It meant that wool was unsalable. Bales piled up at the coast; at Port Elizabeth, where much of the auctioning is done, in the dorps, on railway sidings, and on the farms. A little later no one thought it worth while to shear, for shearing expenses, grotesquely, amounted to more than the wool cheque (if any). South Africa stuck to the gold standard while England went off it. Our pound sterling dropped to 12/6, and no Bradford firm was sending out buyers to pay 20/- for 12/6 worth of wool. Other commodities suffered in the same way.

Most farmers cut down expenses drastically and lived more economically and simply. Here and there a man had an inspiration and turned the bad time to

good account. In the Union one tomato-grower, who could no longer get a fit price for his produce, invented a new drink made from his tomatoes, and did well from it. Very soon bottles of it were to be had everywhere: in trains, cafés, and stores. It was excellent and his enterprise deserved success.

In many districts we reverted to the stone-age system of exchange and barter, amongst ourselves. Finally even our Government did the same, accepting stock in payment of taxes, children's school fees in the Government schools, and so on. In the local stores hats could be bought for carrots, and the attorney's advice for nuts! Consequently some funny things happened, as this story illustrates.

When Jan Viljoen heard that his paternal Government would now accept payment in stock in lieu of cash for the school and hostel fees for his little Marie and Sarah, he was overjoyed. Far easier in these hard days to send eighty slaughter hamals to the magistrate than forty pounds.

So eighty woolly hamals, with Hendriks bringing up the rear of the procession, trekked from the farm to the dorp thirty miles distant. "Muft Hamal", the oldest sheep of the full-mouthed clump, wished Baas Viljoen had thought it worth while to shear him before the trek, for the heat of the veld was intense, and water scarce en route.

Arrived at the magistrate's house, Muft Hamal and his seventy-nine companions were driven into a newly erected kraal, where hundreds of other small stock of all shapes and sizes, all representing school fees paid and receipted, were already herded together.

For some days the entire flock was fed on lucerne and mealies supplied for a price by the farmers who had sent in the sheep. Then it occurred to the magistrate that there wasn't much profit to the Government in this scheme. What the deuce could he do with the sheep?

Inspiration rewarded the worthy official's self-questioning. Why not give the creatures in payment instead of cash to the dozens of men on the local dam-construction works?

With the agreement of the workers concerned, and after much writing of letters bound up tightly with red tape, during which the flock continued to eat the profits, the magistrate's suggestion was followed.

Muft Hamal went with the first draft. He was trekked twenty-six miles out of town to the X River dam, and, along with five plebeian fat-tails, fell to the lot of one Piet Van Heerden, as part payment of that artisan's monthly wage. Piet scratched his hay-coloured head.

"Six?" he said. "How am I to eat six of you?" he apostrophized the apathetic-looking sheep.

But his problem was solved by the immediate arrival of the mail cart. It brought a letter from the dorp's garage proprietor, who demanded at least part payment of a bill for eight pounds for long-past repairs to Van Heerden's now defunct tin Lizzie. The letter contained a sentence which said: "I'll take payment in vegetables or anything, same as everyone else is doing."

Piet was quite pleased. He slaughtered one sheep for himself and sent Muft Hamal and four others footslogging twenty-six miles back to the dorp the very next morning, having forgotten to feed and water them in the meantime. Of course the garage man sent a grouse at their poverty with his receipt.

Now the garage man had recently purchased a fourth-hand three-cylindereed Pant-hard from a farmer thirty miles out of the dorp, and was being pestered for "payment in any form, same as everyone is doing now".

"He can have these five wretched sheep for a start," muttered the garage man, and calling his boy, Music, bade him then and there steer Muft Hamal and his four companions out to Jan Viljoen's farm. Music was more accustomed

to driving lorries than sheep, so Muft Hamal arrived home again to the place of his birth, very footsore, hungry, thirsty, and thin. And his arrival coincided with a further demand from the magistrate on Jan Viljoen for next term's school fees for little Marie and Sarah.

So that same day Jan Viljoen picked out another clump of hamals to send to the magistrate. Naturally he left the fattest, so that is why poor Muft Hamal once more found himself hoofing his weary way dorpwards again, panting along inside his heavy fleece, and scarce able to see with the wool in his eyes. He had tried to evade Hendriks, but Hendriks had grabbed his hind leg and driven him forth to the road.

Muft Hamal decided bitterly that he loathed hiking. After twenty-five miles he began to totter, and when he saw the magistrate's kraal he decided he loathed living. He didn't want to see the magistrate, or Piet Van Heerden, or the garage man, or Jan Viljoen again, and perhaps again, as the balance of their bills. So he celebrated that first of April by lying down and dying on the magistrate's doorstep!

It was during this period, too, that we learnt the value of bread. One day a trek Boer and his two wagons rumbled up to Barenklau and asked for water for his sheep, goats, and donkeys, offering to pay us in goats. I liked the look of his children, with whom the Klein Baas was already making friends around the tented wagons, which were now outspanned. So I asked the trekker's wife and family of seven in to tea. There were four doorsteps of little girls in short cotton frocks and kappies, and three boys, who were sturdy youngsters in open shirts and khaki shorts. All ran around in bare feet.

For tea I set out a large fruit cake, Queen cakes, biscuits, shortbread, bread and butter, and plenty of home-made jam.

To our surprise, the children ignored the cakes, even when pressed. They sat tight and steadily waded into the bread-and-butter, their mouths too full to speak, their cheeks bulging, their eyes exchanging significant glances. Significant of what?

The mother explained. Although her husband possessed a good flock of sheep and goats, and they were fairly well off, in these times when there was no sale for wool, mutton, or hides, they had no money. They had lived for six months now on their own produce as they trekked: meat from the sheep, milk from the goats, eggs from the crated fowls. Sometimes they got some mealie meal in exchange for stock. But storekeepers would not sell wheat flour for anything but cash. So for six months they had had no bread, except occasionally some inferior loaves made from rye flour. Wheat flour was short in this part of the world. So our bread, both brown and white, was the first the children had tasted for a long time. I took a vow then, in 1931, never to put so much as one crust in a dustbin again as long as I lived. Very sensibly these children preferred the brown bread to the white; the Boer always does. He always buys "Boer meal". It is coarse wheat flour, more nourishing than any refined flour, and in this country much cheaper.

We sent out to the kitchen for more and more bread, and those children ate it all. The parents wired in too, and it was good to see. Before they left we gave them our last loaves and as much flour as we could spare. The mother thanked us with tears in her eyes. I remember her look now whenever I encounter carelessness and waste over bread.

I kept thinking of that family after they had moved on, and felt depressed. Then as usual the veld produced, as complete contrast, a jolly good laugh. The best sort of laugh, since it was against myself, making up one of life's most awkward moments.

Next day, feeling hot and tired after the morning's work, I went to change.

My eyes lighted, as often before, on a trunk containing an old evening frock or two. Absently I opened it. Then, seized with a whim to dress up, I got out a frock and all its accessories.

Gladly I peeled off the morning's clothes and bathed. Then I dressed in the old glad rags, old-fashioned now but quite fresh and shimmery all the same. When dressed I returned to the living-room. The frock was cool and it would be comfortable to keep it on for a little while I had a cigarette.

"Er—good afternoon!" said a voice, and two startled faces peered through the open door from the stoep to the living-room. They were two commercials, travelling by car, longing for a cup of tea. Why didn't the earth open up for me?

But I was trapped and perforce entertained the guests, on a hot afternoon, clad in low-cut, gorgeous brocade, and gold shoes; beringed and bejewelled, and feeling mighty silly. Mercifully James was away in the dorp.

It was late summer, and the two commercials were selling tweeds in anticipation of winter some three months ahead.

"Perhaps the lady doesn't wear tweeds, eh?" said one, eying my absurd finery. But I offered no explanation. If I did, it would spoil the yarn they would have to spin when they got back to Cape Town, of the eccentric dame they had found on the backveld. Perhaps I was like the crazy bride in Dickens's *Great Expectations*!

I bought no tweed that afternoon, but felt sure the amusement of the two travellers at my lunatic appearance compensated them for the lack of a sale. Anyway, I blessed them for the laugh they gave me.

CHAPTER XVII

AFTER THE EPISODE WHEN THE KLEIN BAAS GOT LOST ON THE VELD, THE KALAHARI, as a desert, seemed more real. It is often spoken of as a great thirstland, because its rainfall is negligible and there is no surface water. But undoubtedly there is artesian water, and some day this vast district must be developed.

This is why the present inhabitants of the Kalahari face final extinction. For the Kalahari, incredibly, is inhabited, by that pigmy tribe known as the Bushman. Today they are to be found nowhere else but in South-West Africa.

It seems that sometimes to the European mind the word Bushman means, vaguely, a native of South Africa who lives out in the bush. In fact, the Bushman is a distinct race, a very old race, perhaps the original of mankind, whose real origin is lost in the mists of man's stone-age history, thousands of years ago.

Once upon a time the Bushman lived in the lands of plenty. Never have they been husbandmen, because of this plenty. They have always been hunters, living on the huge herds of game that existed in Africa before the white man knew that Africa existed at all.

Then in more recent centuries the Bushmen were attacked and driven from all sides, until now the last little handful find themselves marooned in the inhospitable Kalahari. Savagely loving their freedom, they have retired before every foe into that last stronghold. Always they have been individualists, living in small groups or families, with no leader, and no organization, relying on no other defence than their poisoned arrows. Small wonder that they have been almost exterminated, by Africa's more powerful native races, and by the ever spreading invasion of the white man.

These tiny people, never more than four feet in height, have now but one preoccupation—that of existing. How do they get their food, and, more important still, their drink?

The underground water of the Kalahari is sometimes nearer the surface than the white man realizes. But the Bushman knows, and can find it. Then he sucks it up through a long hollow tube, which he digs into the ground. He also has ways of storing rainwater. But the thing which has really saved the Bushman is the sama melon. It is a small green melon a little larger than a cricket ball, which is produced by a sprawling ground plant. It grew freely on Barenklau. The Bushman utilizes every part of this fruit: he dries and grinds the seeds into flour, eats the pulp, and sucks the 'juice'. Unpicked, and left lying on the ground, we found that the sama melon stayed in sound condition long after the parent plant had withered, but collected and stored under sand it can be kept by the Bushman right through the year, from one crop till the next.

Another succulent fruit of this district is the wild cucumber. It also is a ground creeper, bearing prolifically. The fruit is two to three inches in length, and the green skin is covered with soft, rubbery prickles, much more pronounced than the elementary prickles of the highly cultivated glasshouse cucumber of Europe. We often used these wild cucumbers in salads, and found them good, though rather more bitter than the cultivated cucumber.

Through long years the digestive organs of the Bushman have adapted themselves to his meals. He can go without food for many days on end, and then suddenly devour, on a very empty stomach, an enormous repast which would kill any white man. He is helped in this, too, by a sort of camel's hump he has developed: a very fat posterior, on which his body draws for sustenance in times of famine!

The Bushman is perforce a great meat-eater, and spends a big proportion of his life hunting game with his poisoned arrows. No white man has yet discovered the secrets of the poisons used. But it is known that they are vegetable poisons, and not snake venom, as is often supposed. Snake poison, being slower in action than the vegetable poisons, would enable a wounded animal to escape perhaps beyond recovery by the hunters. Also the Bushman is scarcely ignorant of the fact that snakes are dangerous to tackle, and that their venom would not be easy to get regularly and in sufficient quantity.

When a party of Bushmen have made a kill of game—lion, wildebeeste, gemsbok, etc.—they fall upon it immediately, and eat it raw until every scrap of it—hide, hair, entrails, and meat—has been consumed. Very little but bare bones is left for the aasvogels or vultures, hovering overhead. The Bushmen prefer their meat fresh, but if they happen on a carcase of game, and they are hungry, they will eat it, however rotten it may be, and it does them no harm at all.

Apart from meat they eat berries and roots, particularly the bulbous roots of uyutjes, a small sedge-like plant. Other delicacies they appreciate are the ant-larvae, locusts, lizards, veld mice, birds, and some kinds of snake. They eat things raw as a rule, and their only knowledge of cooking consists of throwing strips of meat on to the embers of a wood fire for a few minutes.

In spite of terribly Spartan circumstances the Bushmen still find heart to do their old tribal dances. These dances, in the manner of primitive peoples, all tell a story. The hunting dances are naturally prime favourites. Usually the men do the dancing, while the women chant, stamp, and clap out the rhythm. Sometimes the affair goes on all night after a particularly plenteous feast of raw game.

The women of this race are tiny, ochre-skinned figures, very like the men in appearance, for both men and women "dress" alike. Each wears a narrow belt

of hide from which hangs a small apron of deerskin fore and aft. Perhaps an anklet or necklace of lion's teeth or wood beads is added for decoration. That is all. The men carry bows and arrow-quivers, and the women generally possess a small leather pouch for carrying their fire-making sticks and flints, pipe, and such weeds as they smoke for tobacco.

The Bushman can be an artist of some merit, for from time to time paintings and carvings of Bushman execution have been found in caves. Tiny, beautifully made beads of ostrich-shell have been found too, and are often worn by their women today. Much of the little we know of Bushman history has been gleaned from these paintings and carvings.

It is said there cannot be more than 7000 Bushmen remaining today. So it is urgent that the South African Government should consider their survival as a problem to be solved now. For unless this intensely interesting tribe is to die out entirely, some reserve other than a murderous desert will have to be given them in which to live in freedom. There is no other solution possible, for these little people will resist to extinction before they will allow themselves to be scattered, and absorbed into the community of South Africa. It is a matter of fact that a Bushman wilts and dies in civilization, or in captivity: when caught for some crime and imprisoned he dies.

The wild game of southern Africa is preserved in the Kruger National Park; the Bastards and other peoples have their reserved lands. Government is helping the intelligent Ovambo to remain intact as a tribe. But the Bushman is still left to die in a blistering desert. The Americans woke up in time to save the last of their Indians. Perhaps the Bushman may get a fair deal before it is too late.

It was, of course, from the Kalahari that the sandstorms came during that brief season between the winter ending in August and the beginning of summer which was allegedly our spring. These sandstorms are much worse than anything ever experienced in the Karroo in times of drought. And they were an annual visitation of regularity and force. Mercifully their season was short—much shorter than London's season of fogs, and "Mists and mellow fruitfulness!" (Frightfulness would be more apt!) Also, mercifully, the stuff that blew our way was honest sand, and not that fine talc-like dust of the baked prairies of Kansas, U.S.A. It is said that there this powder dust hangs high in the air for many hours after the storm has passed, and sometimes takes days to finish descending and settling. Our storms carried a stinging sand which whistled through the tiniest chinks, gritted between the teeth, and piled in beach-like drifts on the floors, window-sills, and all flat surfaces. But once the gale stopped the air was at once clear. We could breathe freely again. It only remained to sweep the drifts out of the house and dust and polish everything.

Sometimes a sandstorm would blow up out of a clear sky at night. The preliminary whine and moan of the wind would wake us, and we would flash our torches and leap out of bed to rush and shut all doors and windows. If we had been sleeping on the stoep, we would hurl our bedding and mattresses through the french doors into the bedroom. There is no time to move the beds. Even by that time the first sand-devil may have hit the house. Then for the rest of the night we would sleep with damp towels across our faces, and in the morning when we got up the sheets would be brown, except for a white patch the shape of our figures.

The worst of these storms, from the hausfrau's point of view, is their irregular arrival. If she cleans the house up thoroughly after one storm, another may sweep up an hour later. If she takes her time about doing anything beyond the preliminary ejection of the drifts, the air may be clear and calm for a week!

The day storms were the worst, for they interrupted all normal activity.

Out on the veld the sheep and animals stood with their backs to the wind in patience. Humans caught out there crouched under their jackets for hours. And in the homestead it was a nightmare to cook the meals. The sand even seemed to filter under the saucepan lids.

In October the sandy season was generally laid by a few thunder-showers, which were welcome, though insufficient to benefit the veld very much. And then the summer set in. Through November and December the heat increased, until Christmas Day came in with a temperature of 110° in the shade.

There are ways of combating this heat. At 5 a.m. we opened up every door and window to let in the cool dawn air, and about 7.30 a.m. closed in the coolness and darkened the house. We soaked all coir mats in water, so that air blowing under doorways should be cooled. And in the doors which were little frequented we hung cold wet curtains. Sitting reading, writing, or sewing in the cool, dim living-room, it was quite easy to forget that outside the bleached veld quivered in hot light. Cold baths and showers were refreshing, and if the legs felt a bit limp, we put on stockings and stood in a bucket of cold water, knee deep, for a moment. If the stockings were kept on for about ten minutes the legs became delightfully chilled and braced, and the stockingless state could be adopted again!

It is at this time of year that everyone, black and white, indulges in siesta. After a cold lunch you take a bath, a book, and a kimono.

December 25th started early in the morning with an orgy of giving. Gladstone, Disraeli, and the rest, with wives and piccanins, came to the front stoop to grin, wriggle their feet, and accept their gifts of twist tobacco, sweets, and cotton dress-lengths. Never suggest that the women should choose their cloth. Even if they could make up their minds, this procedure would cause jealousy and disagreement. Who would have first choice, for instance? Firmly hand each woman what you intend her to have. Sometimes they will make an amiable exchange before your eyes, but that is then their business. The accompaniment to this ceremony is a ripple of giggles, rolling eyes, asides, and many a "melly Christmas", sounding like a continuous twittering of birds.

James would then tell the boys that if they came to the house again at sundown he would have something else for them. It is illegal to supply a native with alcohol, but, law or no law, it is customary to give your boys a quick one on the doorstep at Christmas. And as the "girls" and children roll up again too, we always kept a second batch of small gifts ready for them. It was expected of us. These generally consisted of foods: a little extra sugar, coffee, some tea, and meal.

During this hot Christmas season the orange and lemon juice we had bottled earlier came in very useful for the entertainment of the numerous guests who liked to get out of the dorp for a day or two. A favourite was called "Put me under the table", for lack of an official name. To make it you soak three whole eggs in a bowl of lemon juice for three days. Crush what remains of the shell, stir, and strain. To this mixture add 1 pint of milk, $\frac{1}{4}$ lb. of sugar, and rum to taste. We often substituted dop for rum. Shake well, bottle, and chill. It makes a grand pick-me-up and cocktail.

To bottle the orange and lemon juice (in July) we collected several sacks of fruit from the garden, cut each in half, and put the sections through the mangle. To the resulting juice add to each pint 1 cup of sugar and $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoonful of salicylic acid crystals. Stir till quite dissolved, and bottle. No cooking is required, and the juice keeps indefinitely.

One cold drink we made from this fruit juice was specially refreshing. To half of a pint tumbler of orange or lemon juice add half a pint of cold tea, a sprig of crushed mint and a pinch of Eno's fruit salt. Stir well.

Yet, although cold drinks are nice, we found that hot tea was always more reviving than anything on a grilling afternoon. There is no meal nicer than 4.30 tea, after the siesta. Similarly a cold meal is generally started with a hot soup of some light kind, such as clear soup, or clear mulligatawny. Which reminds me that various kinds of curry are always palatable, and cooling in the hot weather paradoxical as that may seem.

For the Klein Baas, while still little, we always had a Christmas tree on December 25th, and invited some small friends to share it. There were no fir trees within hundreds of miles, so we decorated a growing thorn bush on the veld near the house. The thorns obligingly upheld the candles. On the bush we hung the usual shiny ornaments, paper chains, and tinsel, plus brass curtain rings, cellophane bags of sweets, and little presents in bright paper. Also we tied on washed carrots pendant, for Liesel, who liked to attend the party, and bones tied with red ribbon for the dogs. The cats remained aloof, and later accepted a special supper. Tradition alone prompted the use of lit candles. They were pale and insignificant in the sunlight, and were quite outshone by the loud glitter of all the tree's shining ornaments. But what is a Christmas tree without candles?

When we had all gathered around the tree, James as Santa Claus would drive up in a cloud of dust and the donkeymobile. His outfit was of scarlet muslin, with cottonwool fur, so he was not so hot as he looked (at 6 p.m. with the temperature still about 90 in the shade).

For the tea, which was taken before going out to the tree, we always decorated the living-room with masses of balloons. The Klein Baas loved balloons dearly. Once he disgraced us when asked to a party elsewhere: he looked in a superior way at the beautiful paper chains and then said loudly:

"What! No balloons!"

The blowing up of the balloons was a strenuous, heat-making job, which had to be left till the last moment before the guests' arrival. In that climate the life of a balloon is short. Nevertheless we always had balloons galore.

One Christmas there was a grand finale to the tree. A little veld breeze sidled in and blew a candle flame awry. The tinder-dry bush caught and there was a mighty conflagration. Happily, presents had been distributed, and the children thought it was part of the fun we had planned. Only Liesel disapproved, and left us hurriedly, and the stembok's velvet eyes became large, and he too shot away for safety, as he thought.

From the New Year onward we looked for the rains, and everyone rejoiced if they broke early and evenly all over the countryside. When it rained it pelted as if mighty hosts of Zulu impis had hurled shimmering assegais down from above to thunder on our tin roof. After a hot summer, I think there is no atmosphere so heavenly as that paradoxical cool, balmy warmth of the rains. There is the scent of the sizzling veld sending up clouds of steam as if a cold douche had fallen on a red-hot poker; the community croaking of thousands of frogs in the vleis; the double and even triple rainbows so vivid in the bright sunshine between the heavy showers; the overnight green sprouting of the eight-day grass; the myriads of swelling buds on the trees and bushes, each with a glittering raindrop ear-ring pendant; and all of it seems a miracle after the sandstorms and heat.

One day, when very small, the Klein Baas ran out to play with the piccanins, and although there was a break in the rains he returned soaking wet.

"What *have* you been doing?" we asked.

"Just bathing," was the reply, "in the water-holes on the veld."

Bathing, clothes and all! After that he was dressed throughout the rains in a bathing costume.

The rains merged into winter from the end of April, and then we had the season of big fires of mis and logs leaping up the chimneys. Our guests in the summer danced on the stoep to that devil-box the gramophone, and trod on the pint tumblers which no one remembered to place anywhere but on the floor; now we gathered around the big brick fireplace in the living-room, drank hot toddies and told yarns, and sometimes made up nonsense rhymes about life on the veld. Someone would throw a handful of dry mealie cobs on to the fire, and there would be a flare of flame with a burst of merriment.

It was at the beginning of the winter that the final crops of pumpkins and marrows were picked, and put to finish ripening on the roofs of wagon-shed and outhouses for use through the cold weather. Also the remaining tomatoes were picked from the sunk beds in the garden and pickled, bottled, or made into jam and chutneys. Some people left the fruit on the bushes, and covered the plants with sacking as protection from frost, but this always struck us as untidy and unsightly. So we always cleared up our beds early.

There was very little illness on Barenklau, but what there was seemed to crop up in the cold weather. As everywhere, the natives had a pathetic belief in the white man's ability to effect magical cures. We soon learnt that the chief trouble was headache and constipation caused through overeating. For this castor oil was gladly accepted. Our patients loved it, and would have stolen it in quantity if given a chance. They would come next day and report happily that it had "driven the devil out" of them quite thoroughly!

Care was needed in handing out remedies for small ills. Once a Hottentot house-girl showed me some gnat-bites on her arms, and asked for something to relieve the itchiness. I handed her a bottle of household ammonia when she was leaving to go home to her pontok. She was half-way to the gate with it, when she hesitated and returned.

"Missus," she said, "do I drink all in this bottle, or only a little?"

Horried, I anointed her bites then and there, and kept the bottle of ammonia.

These people have all the simple soul's love of "a bottle". A bottle full of coloured water flavoured with peppermint essence delighted them, and many times have we cured some "old soldier" with such faith healing! Always the bottle itself, as well as the mild contents, was appreciated. It was tough work trying to persuade our boys and girls to bring back those medicine bottles. The Kaffir is a born collector. He will throw nothing away. Bottles, jars, tins, rags, cracked crockery, worn-out cooking-pots and a hundred other such things are all hoarded. Why? They just don't know!

Sometimes the homeliest remedies of the veld proved the most efficacious. Once Jacob, the shepherd, cut his hand badly on barbed wire. He did not tell us till his whole arm was poisoned, and did not seem to realize the seriousness of his hurt. A cactus "leaf" saved him. We heated the juicy cactus stem in the oven, slit it open, and applied it to his wound. By next morning the poison was well drawn from Jacob's arm.

We had warned all hands that if ever they got bitten by any snake, they were to lose no time in coming for injections of antidote. But although we kept the serum always, we never have had to use it on a human being. Curly, the dog, once got bitten by something, as he came in with a swollen and painful foot, and for days was very ill. We gave him the injections, and he recovered. It may, of course, have been a scorpion sting, and the cure a matter of course. But the final and mysterious result was that Curly, whom we had thought to be full grown at the time, suddenly developed and filled out into a most hefty hound, and became much more aggressive in spirit, where before he had been a bit timid! We did not know whether to thank the poison or the antidote.

Malaria was rare in our district, and we have never had to sleep under stuffy mosquito nets. The 'flu germ also came very rarely.

When everyone leads such an open-air life involving plenty of strenuous exercise, illness of all sorts is automatically kept at a distance. Our good health came from our daily work, which combined in the happiest way the earning of our living with the pleasure of living. We did not work for so many hours and play for an interval; the two went together all the time: while we were driving or riding to the outlying camps; digging, irrigating, and planting their gardens as well as the homestead garden; attending to the sheep, dipping them, counting them, doctoring them, and sorting them. It was all done in the open air and perennial sunshine.

And, of course, we had plenty of fruit and fresh vegetables, milk and eggs, the producing and eating of which are an equal pleasure and benefit.

The sicknesses which agitated us most were those in connection with our stock. But although we had some scares, we have never had serious losses from that scourge blue tongue, or its equal, the scab.

Yes, the Kalk in South-West Africa, and Barenklau on it, is a healthy spot. You get sandstorms and heat, loneliness, snakes, and marauding animals, but you cannot get run over by a bus, or caught in a pea-soup fog. And you do not, when the day's work is finished, have to fight your way home through a competitive mob in a tube train teeming with germs, midst the smell of a toilworn, tired humanity.

Whenever we drive home at sunset from our dorp, we bounce over the limestone in the donkeymobile, or the lorry, and as we curve into our private road the windows of Barenklau glow a crimson, winking welcome, and if the breeze is right a surge of orange blossom and garden scents greets us from the oasis which we have made.



EPILOGUE

HAVE I SAID ENOUGH TO PROVIDE AN APPETIZER TO RAISE A LAND-HUNGER IN you? If anything I have written has produced even one pang, that is good. For this land-hunger is a wholesome urge which leads to happiness if only it can be followed. Surely it is a craving very natural to every Briton, for has not agriculture been a glory of England until it was put to stand piteously in a corner by the madness of the industrial age which first swamped us in the nineteenth century? Before the people of Britain bricked themselves up their heritage was a green and pleasant land, with distances for the eye, and air and space for the body and soul. But for all our recent swarming into cities, thank God we have never quite lost our love of the land. Even during our madness between the two great wars, when we again turned our backs on the land, we built here and there, on the fringes of the overcrowded areas, specimens of that crazy paradox known as the garden city. And we converted big estates into housing estates which were rashes of houses in railed-in quarter-acre plots. Everyone who possibly could has clung to that quarter acre. As that octopus the speculative builder reached out his horrid tentacles farther and farther from London, and other cities, this legion of garden-lovers retreated to Guildford, Sevenoaks, Haywards Heath—anywhere sufficiently far just to enable them to keep that precious little patch of earth, yet close enough to their city work for them to catch an early morning "daily breeder" train. And throughout Britain the Women's

Institutes have fostered and kept alive the love of land and its produce that is in every Briton, deep down and almost forgotten. All through this war, as in the last, hard-working men have found time, even after their Home Guarding and Civil Defence work, to run their allotments, again clinging to that quarter acre in yet another form.

Let us admit it. Does not this pathetic clinging to our little gardens, and even our window-boxes and hanging baskets, prove our craving for beauty and space? No Briton really wants to live in a herd, stalled and fed, and Beveridged artificially. Who wants to be safely cooped in brick, and kept all through three-score years and ten of existence on the chicken-feed of a small salary? Even the people who have become so spiritually atrophied that they automatically play for absolute safety, so that they can have a house, some hire-purchase furniture, a baby one year and a car the next, and a vacuum-cleaner the following year, with a sewing-machine, a washing-machine, and a refrigerator to come, one at a time, every twelve months—even these people dump all their painfully acquired possessions in a quarter-acre plot if they possibly can. The rest, in flats and apartments, group their belongings around a potted plant, a hanging basket, a geranium on the sill, or a patch of flowers in a cemented courtyard. Always there is that little handful of earth. I believe the longing for it has never quite deserted the most city-hardened Briton.

Recently we have removed the railings from around the gardens, both public and private, of Britain. Although we know the purpose of this, cannot we take it as symbolical, as a removal of bonds, an opening to real freedom, a call away from the small flowerpot and the quarter acre to the wider life of a whole world from which to choose our own place?

Although the British have had considerable practice at community and herd living of recent years, in the mammoth blocks of flats thrown up in all our cities, we have proved ourselves bad at communal living. In these warrens, the women-folk get too intimate, and then quarrel, and the men, afraid of being spoken to by a stranger, sidle like crabs into their own holes as unobtrusively as possible. There is no air of brightness in the building, only furtiveness!

Once, very many years ago, a London office girl I knew then brought home to her bed-sitting-room a little cactus in a red clay pot. She had paid a hard-earned 5/- for it. She came in out of a November drizzle holding it in her hand.

"Why a cactus?" I asked.

"Oh . . . I don't know. This weather, perhaps. They grow in the earth where it's warm and sunny."

Yes, they grow in the warm sunny earth. She married later, and went abroad, from where she wrote and told me she had helped to chop down hedges of the darned thing! But how happy she was in their environment, where the earth was warm and sunny! And I, in South-West, when I admired the big yellow flowers of our cactus hedge at the far end of the garden, and ate the delicious purple pulp of its fruit, have been prompted to write her a letter very often. The cactus and the sunshine have kept me in touch with a friend I might otherwise have let slip. And both of us have given thanks that our fate did not lie in a city house or flat, complete with vacuum cleaner, etc., and what-not cunningly acquired year by year.

Instead, I, who have none of these things, have seen the hedges of blue plumbago, and the spread of wild pig lilies (Madonna lilies in English glasshouses) at the Cape of Good Hope, the golden wild irises glowing in the sunlight of the George district, the veld stardusted with white chinchichee, and pink freesia. And James and I have raised thousands of sheep and goats, melons, and vegetables, and fruits of all sorts, not on a quarter acre, or under glass, laboriously, but in the open, on as many acres of our 22,000 as we could cultivate and water.

It is fun to pick your own peaches out in the garden and visualize some poor mutt paying 5/- for one in London!

Sometimes when the day's work is done and we feel a bit tired with that lovely weariness which happy hard work gives to the mind and body, we put on a last spurt of energy and climb a kopje and look out over our land.

"Look!" we say. "It's all ours for miles!"

A lot of it is sandy, some of it is rocky and hard limestone, part of it is brackish, acres are pitted with animal holes and burrows—but no one can tell us to keep off the grass, or not to pick the flowers, or that trespassers will be prosecuted. No one can stop our horses when we ride, and say: "This is not a bridle-path. You must go back."

No. It is all our very own (forget the mortgage!), to tame, cherish, coax, and enjoy; to share with our friends, and all living things on it. And from up there on the kopje, as the sun was halved by the far blue horizon and the light went out in a final glory of flame and fire, we thanked Heaven and all in it for that Boer saying, "Tomorrow is another day." It had not sounded so good when the builders dawdled along over the building of our house, but on these later occasions it was good to know that another day's work and pleasure awaited us on our land, our own wide, wild acres, when again the sun strode over the kopjes in a glamour of golden light.

"But don't you ever want to go to a cinema?" wrote a relation from England. Oh yes, we had been inoculated young with the poison of mass enjoyment. Sometimes we left our acres of soil and jolted thirty miles into the dorp, not only to buy essential stores but to go to the bioscope, as we call the cinema out here. Once a week an enterprising garage proprietor in Mariental put on a show. On wobbly chairs set out in rows on the cement floor of a cleared-out garage we sat and gazed on the luscious close-ups and hundred-foot kisses in Hollywood's presentations of "High Life"—what a pair of words! Who knows why we did it, for the films were ancient enough to have been spurned by Cape Town's cheapest bug-house cinemas. I suppose we went because it brought us into contact with fellow human beings. There seems to be no other reason. For when we went to the Cape on holiday we never once entered any of Cape Town's super cinemas. There were plenty of fellow humans to be seen in the streets, shops, and hotels. Anyway, our garage cinema in Mariental did not survive long.

There are no easy pleasures on the veld. Without electricity you can only have a battery set of wireless, and very rarely in our early days did anyone have a wireless at all. Not always can you have a telephone either. We discovered when we made enquiries about getting a 'phone out to Barenklau that even with a "party" arrangement among our farming neighbours the cost of putting up and maintaining the line would be quite prohibitive for each of us. So we went on sending "breefs", or notes, by our natives, euphemistically referred to as "runners". These gentlemen not only walked at their leisure, but often took French leave, and occasionally never returned at all! Once when I sent a runner with a brief, and a basket of fruit to a neighbour some miles off, the basket, brief, and native arrived. So did the fruit for that matter, but it was within the runner by that time!

Never shall we forget the occasion when we sent a runner to fetch us cigarettes from Mariental. It was twenty-four miles as the crow flies and the runner walks. We had been into the dorp the day before, but both James and I had forgotten to replenish our smokes. So next dawn we started off a runner with a note. He stayed away a week. Meanwhile we tried shredding some native shag out of the store-rooms, and rolling it into cigarettes in squares of foreign notepaper. The first inhalation stabbed through our lungs and set our toes tingling. So we went smokeless again.

On the fourth day I stood with hand-shaded eyes on the western end of the stoep.

"Sister Ann, Sister Ann——" began James.

"Don't finish. I see hang-all," I replied.

On the seventh night the native turned up, a runner dawdling cheerfully home by starlight after a holiday. In the darkness at the foot of the steps we saw the gleam of a white grin and the glimmer of a white packet of cigarettes. We seized the parcel and told the grin to skip it.

So you see you cannot have the pleasure of running round the corner to buy a few fags, or look upon some hats. You see what happens if you forget to buy your fags at the proper time. For some days before going into the dorp it is wise to put everything to be taken in there in a tidy heap together, and everything to be brought back on a list. The forgotten cigarettes taught us this method.

Unless you happen to be a cheque-book farmer—that is a fellow with quite a decent private income from other sources—finance will often trouble you, if you let it. Sometimes you will have plenty of money, and at others it will seem that there never will be any again! The remedy is to keep books carefully, strike averages, and budget for well ahead. And do not worry, for you need not do so if you honestly live within what you have estimated, without too much optimism, to be your income. Live every moment fully. Indeed, you will often live most fully when cash is scarcest, for it is then that you will quite naturally do the most work! If that sounds a bit cynical, it is not meant to be: it is just human nature, surely.

In places where money is all-important, you can only exist, and no more, if you lack it. On the veld, wealth is reckoned more in the old Biblical way: in flocks and herds, land and home, in health, contentment and happiness, and a peaceful way of life, close to the earth which we all subconsciously adore. It is the best measurement of security. And the sense of stability is all the greater if you have started in a small way and built up everything from a little beginning, from bare earth and a few head of stock. You know then that it is no mirage put before you by a genie who can snatch it away again. That which you have built cannot crumble to nothingness in a night, like capital invested in mere stocks and shares, or even as the salaried post can melt out suddenly and stunningly by the bankruptcy, death, or other misfortune of your employer.

In the final issue what does security itself matter? The main thing is to live, fully, vividly, in body, soul, and spirit. Planning ahead is, of course, a very sensible measure. But just now, after the chaos through which the world has been, perhaps we are too inclined to swing to the extreme of order, and to think too much about a life planned for the rest of its span on earth. As Lord Elton said at Westminster on May 27th, 1943: "Nobody planned the British Empire. It grew because men and women went where adventure and opportunity beckoned. . . ."

These men and women had courage to live without too much planning ahead, and Fate rewarded and repaid them with a full life and much achieved.

Adventure and opportunity. Can anyone ask more than that combination? Those two words are the very seeds from which real living do spring and flower. Listen to what R. L. Stevenson says about this:

"To reckon dangers too curiously, to hearken too intently for the threat that runs through all the winning music of the world, to hold back the hand from the rose because of the thorn, and from life because of death: this it is to be afraid of Pan. Highly respectable citizens who flee life's pleasures and responsibilities and keep, with upright hat, upon the midway of custom, avoiding the right hand and the left, the ecstasies and the agonies, how surprised they would be if

they could hear their attitude mythologically expressed, and know themselves as tooth-chattering ones, who flee from Nature because they fear the hand of Nature's God! Shrilly sound Pan's Pipes; and behold the banker instantly concealed in the bank pailou! For to distrust one's impulses is to be recreant to Pan "

That ought to be read by every boy and girl about to choose and make his life; by everyone heading towards existence in suburbia's neat monotony; by every fool who imagines that money is life, and that real life consists in making money, and then sitting in a grand house thinking about how much you have got.

The "upright hat" or the bowler of the office-goer need not be every Briton's regalia. Nor need his scutcheon be the typewriter rampant, or the tube train resonant, barred by lines of traffic jam on a foggy ground. He can have, if he but choose it, a springbok under azure, on a ground of sun-gilt veld.

THE END

GLOSSARY

AARDVARK	.	.	.	Antbear.
AASVOGEL	.	.	.	Vulture.
AFRIKAANS	.	.	.	South African language.
BAAS	.	.	.	Master.
BILTONG	.	.	.	Salted dried meat.
BOBOTIE	.	.	.	A meat dish.
BOER	.	.	.	A farmer.
CALABASH	.	.	.	Gourd. A vessel made from the scooped-out shell of the fruit of a creeper.
DASSIE	.	.	.	Rock rabbit.
DOEK	.	.	.	Head scarf.
DOP	.	.	.	South African brandy.
DORP	.	.	.	Small town.
EET SALON	.	.	.	Dining-room, or dining-car.
Fontein	.	.	.	Spring, or fountain.
FRAU	.	.	.	Wife.
GIEL SLANG	.	.	.	Yellow snake.
GREEN MEALIE	.	.	.	Corn on the cob.
*HANSI	.	.	.	Orphan lamb.
HEK	.	.	.	Gate.
I.D.B.	.	.	.	Illicit Diamond Buying.
IMPI	.	.	.	Regiment.
KALK	.	.	.	Limestone.
KAMEELBOOM	.	.	.	Camelthorn tree.
KAROSS	.	.	.	Fur rug.
KINDER	.	.	.	Children.
KLEIN BAAS	.	.	.	Little Master.
KLEINKIE	.	.	.	Little one.
KOEKIES	.	.	.	Little cakes.
KOMFYT	.	.	.	Sweetmeat.
KOP	.	.	.	Head.
KOPJE	.	.	.	Hill.
KORHAAN	.	.	.	Lesser bustard.
KRAAL	.	.	.	Stock pen.
LAAGER	.	.	.	Wagon camp arranged for protection.
LOROLA	.	.	.	Price of a bride.
LOCATION	.	.	.	Native quarter.
LUCERNE	.	.	.	Alfalfa. Leguminous, mauve-flowered fodder plant.
MAK TU	.	.	.	Shut.
MANEL	.	.	.	Tail coat.
MEALIE PAP	.	.	.	Indian corn meal porridge.
MEERKAT	.	.	.	Little squirrel-like creature.
MIS	.	.	.	Fuel of sheep-dung.
MUFT HAMAL	.	.	.	Wool wether.
OPA	.	.	.	Old Father.
PAN	.	.	.	Flat dry lake, e.g. Verneuk Pan, where Sir Malcolm Campbell tried a speed record.
PAU	.	.	.	Bustard.

PICCANIN	.	.	.	Native child
PONTOK	.	.	.	Native hut.
POST DAMPER	.	.	.	Mail boat.
PREDIKANT	.	.	.	Minister of Dutch Reformed Church.
REIM	.	.	.	Hide thong.
SAMA	.	.	.	Wild melon.
SAMP	.	.	.	Crushed Indian corn.
SCOFF	.	.	.	Food.
SNELPSKIN	.	.	.	Informal dance, generally at a farmhouse.
SJAMBOK	.	.	.	Whip, with lash up to 18 feet in length.
SKALPAT	.	.	.	Tortoise.
SLUIT	.	.	.	Watercourse.
SMOUSING	.	.	.	Itinerant trading.
SNOEK	.	.	.	Barracouda.
SPANSPEK	.	.	.	Sweet melon.
STOEP	.	.	.	Verandah.
TAAL	.	.	.	Language.
TICKY	.	.	.	Threepence.
TIGER	.	.	.	A leopard in South Africa.
TIKOLOSHE	.	.	.	Spook.
TREK	.	.	.	Travel (by road).
TRONK	.	.	.	Prison.
UITLANDER	.	.	.	Foreigner.
VELDSCHOEN	.	.	.	Heel-less farm shoes.
VERNEUK	.	.	.	Deceive or cheat.
VLEI	.	.	.	Valley or marsh.
VOETGANGER	.	.	.	Locust in the hopper stage.
VOORTREKKER	.	.	.	Pioneer.
VOSSIE	.	.	.	Red jackal.
VRAATIG!	.	.	.	Truly!

